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THE BLIND ROAD

HUGH GORDON

Fiction, American



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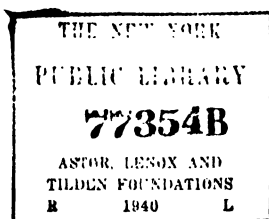
BY
HUGH GORDON



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THE BLIND ROAD

CHAPTER I

THE HEART OF A LOVER

IF I write the intimate truth about the woman I married, I cannot put my true name at the head of this story; and if I write at all, I must tell the truth, down to the last unglossed detail in the history of our life together, or fail of my purpose, which is the only purpose that ever justifies a confession — to put a new blaze upon a trail where others are groping after me, where others are now blindly stumbling.

I recently read what purported to be the story of a husband about his wife. The author did not touch the vital problems and so his book is no guide to the rest of us — to us, the stumblers on the blind trail.

I see them, all around me, every day, beginning as Carmen and I began. I was full of confidence that I was doing the thing I most wanted to do,

on the June day when I stood beside my beautiful girl, in the little church of St. Luke's in our home town, and promised to love and cherish her; and I meant just what I said. The words were no empty forms to me, for I had loved her from high-school days and looked upon her as all that a girl could be to answer my heart's desire. I have stood at many a wedding since and listened while honest lips of friends of mine made similar promises, and I have wondered whether it would not be kindness to tell a story like this — to let them see the inside, the things that haven't been written or told before, but that make up life, young married life, beneath the bloom of the surface which they see. I am going to do it, now, and the purpose is honest. It will be apparent when my story is finished.

She had beauty — my Carmen. She was small and delicate and fair. She had the kind of blue eyes that glow, the sort of golden hair that people call sunny, the full sweet lips that can tempt unspeakably, and a slender, pliant, daintily modeled, little figure that was a joy to the eye which loves sheer loveliness. The cut of her features was clean and fine, but it was not merely their perfection that gave her face its strange power. It was the look of her. I have no better word for it. This is what I mean: she had always in her eyes a suggestion of whimsical



indulgence toward everybody. There was always a mischievous dimpling to emphasize the lure of her lips. There was what seemed to be fairly a sparkle in her color. Her slender little chin was full at once of audacity and of sweetness. Sometimes, I think a woman's chin is her most important feature. I can find no painters' or sculptors' expressions that can describe hers, or the straight little nose that did not turn up, but could look saucy and sympathetic at the same time. Her brows had the quizzical arch and under them the blue of her eyes was so warm and soft and sweet that I don't believe that any other woman ever had quite their equals.

Of course she possessed that subtle thing that may be said to be an endowment of all pretty women, the instinctive knowledge of effective dress; and that other curious, indefinable thing called style. I cannot be sure that this gives an adequate picture of her but it is the best I can present in a few words. She was loveliness itself in my eyes, and there were other men who thought her so, too. Why she elected to accept mine from many offers of marriage, God only knows.

I was mad about her. I have kissed her tiny gloves, with the scent of violets always in them, when she was not by to see. I have been ready to kiss the slender little shoes themselves, because what-

ever she touched was — what shall I say? — bewitched for me. The very clothes she wore I have handled reverently, because they seemed part of her. And herself — I have lived on her smiles and the privilege to caress her. She held the power to make a little golden heaven of our home for me — so strangely sweet that I feared rather than desired any other.

I saw her cross the threshold between girlhood and womanhood, with a passionate boy's awakening eyes. She was always pretty. I have seen baby pictures of her that showed an ethereal little smiling thing who looked as if the Creator meant her for a masterpiece. At five she was a roguish sprite. At twelve she was a fairy queen. At sixteen she was a lovely, laughing nymph. At seventeen, she was a beautiful woman — the most beautiful that I shall ever see, and at seventeen she married me — my Carmen.

How can I tell one little part of what my heart and head and blood have held, over that girl? I remember the first time I ever saw her. She was being drawn home from school on Arnold Granden's blue sled, and she was such a lovely little thing with her pink cheeks and teasing eyes, with the fair little wisps of hair — waving hair — half-veiling them, that I have never forgotten. Perhaps that was the

very beginning of my love. I recall very well that I sent a mischievous snowball after Arnold when they had passed me in sheer envy of him because that lovely little creature had looked at me as she passed.

I remember the first time I spoke to her — and she to me — at a boy-and-girl party, as much as a year later, though I had seen her often meanwhile. I, who was always fascinated by her, dared to ask her to dance with me, though only at my hostess' request, for I hated dancing then; and she consented, archly asking if I could dance as well as I could throw,—and so flattering me enormously because she remembered.

I remember the first time I sought her, when on a school-outing I found her alone in a swing under a wide-armed oak, and I undertook to push her into motion and found my advance welcomed by a smile. I suppose I was not more than fifteen then, but I found it sweet to be near her — so sweet that no baseball game could draw me away that day.

I remember the first time I ever touched her — really touched her, consciously and intentionally, understand, when we stood on the bridge over the river, in our little home town, where we had wandered together on our way home from church service on a Sunday evening. It was winter then

and cold and dark, and the river was full of ice, white with snowy covering. But my heart was hot, and I found a way to slip my hand into the warm little muff she carried—as we stood, talking of skating and Christmas and the last little dancing party—and to take hold on the slim little fingers there and keep them, while I struggled to talk on coolly and connectedly. I was eighteen then. I had wanted to have little Carmen Brainard away by herself alone with me, often and often by that time; and I was dreaming with the love of her—boy-love, wild, unreasoning, instinctive, seeking, mating love, that is pure and honest and God-given, too; and my soul and spirit and very vital breath were beginning to yearn for her, so that I would have sold the blood out of my veins to possess her favor.

People laugh at and scorn the boy in love. If you dared admit it, that love you call puppy-love, took hold of you, too, once, and commanded you, and kept you feverishly awake at night, and drove you to moodiness and unreasonable things, to things you blush to think of now; and that puppy-love is more pure and good and square, and far more uncalculating than any that comes after, unless that after love, too, holds the same elements.

God made us so. The boy can't help it that his desire for the little dainty maiden, next door, con-

sumes him, mind and body and judgment and prejudice, and makes a certain sort of a fool out of him. Who gave girlish beauties the power to clutch the very heartstrings of the boy who looks upon sparkling eyes and rounding figure? And the man, too, who doesn't love a woman so, doesn't love honestly.

I was a fool — that sort of a fool. Before I was twenty I loved Carmen Brainard so that it came hard to breathe when I walked beside her and felt that she was even kind in her feeling for me. I loved her so that the light in her window at night was rainbow's end for me. I loved her so that I saw all her sex, which I had scorned, in a hallowed light. I loved her so that the whole world bloomed to my eyes when she smiled and frosted under her coldness. I loved her so that it humbled me and gentled my rude boy mind and gave me aspirations and exalted thoughts and ambitions I had never had, and turned some, at least, of the grossness of me into better stuff.

I have heard it said, by people who claim to know, that women love men for their physical strength and their stanch honesty. Perhaps it is so. I have seen women love the sort of male beings other men are wont to designate as sissies, however, and I have seen women love crooks. So I am not convinced.

I happened to be physically strong and I was not a crook. Perhaps Carmen may have cared for those qualities in me. She favored me, off and on, all through from our childhood up, from the time of sleds and skates to the time of flowers and carriages. I have wondered sometimes if it was not the sheer ardency of my passion over her that made her willing to be its object. That's the basis of another theory, that love begets love. Perhaps that is so. You feel the stir of kindness for the very blundering puppy that tumbles affectionately over your feet. Your heart warms to the man who wrings your hand, to the woman whose eyes soften to your glance, to the baby who crows and reaches up pudgy fists at your approach. Perhaps women love the fellow who worships — because he worships.

But Carmen married me. She said she loved me — one tender April night when we stood in the depths of her father's garden, when I had come home to visit from the city, where work had taken me after school-days. Under the lilacs' shadow at the lane-gate, that night, the white gown-thing she wore was filmy thin as moonlight upon her shapely shoulders. I had guided her through the shadows of the path, with my hand upon her firm round arm. I had drawn her close, as we paused and the perfume of her hair had touched

my live senses like a breath upon smoldering coals. Her eyes shone in the starlight, and the fire that was in me flamed beyond control at last. Looking down at her smiling tender lips, all the reverent boy-love I had made to her in clumsy diffident way, grew up suddenly into man's love — strange mixture of reverence and desire, adoration and savage demand for possession. The flame simile is good because it burns, to a scorching sometimes, and because it grows and spreads and overwhelms with little enough encouragement. And the mood and impulse to master her that night, to compel the love I had been seeking, to take her by storm and force and end courting and rivalry — for I had rivals in plenty — mastered me. So I violated all gentleness and chivalry I suppose by seizing her and demanding that she give herself to me forever. And she yielded, and promised.

It is an unforgettable thing, that yielding. It is one of the few things that stir me now. Surprised, but not angered, amused but indulgent, with swift excitement of her own, with answering something in her being that my roughness touched but did not offend, with gentleness enrapturing and sweetness intoxicating, she yielded to my first embrace. And despite all that has followed since, to eclipse and efface it, that moment will always live in my memory

— that moment of the kiss, that was to all that had gone before as the taste of dulcet wine to its aroma.

I was only half sane, in the house again, afterwards, when I had to stand and talk to other pretty women gathered in our small-town party-fashion for the evening and to men who were my friends. Because the thing possessed me like wine itself, I was at once amazingly alive to my own emotions and a little numbed to all else. And when I saw Carmen dancing with Arnold Granden, who was a suitor, too, now, and one I had thought was dangerous, I found it easy to laugh and then to feel sorry for him, because I knew how hard it would have hit me to lose her to him.

After her father and mother gave consent to our wedding, I went back to my chosen city, to make a home ready for her. I was not rich. I started poor and was only doing well in the very prosaic work that I had taken up. I was an advertising man, commonplace unromantic employment enough surely, with a good salary, and the beginnings of a reputation. Success enough to marry on, that was how I looked upon it. So the apartment of which I began to try to make a home, was a modest though comfortable one.

It was on a good street, in a handsome building.

Its rooms were bright and cozy and pretty. Carmen and her mother came to look at it — for the home town was not far from the city — and they liked my choice. And we chose our furniture, we three, while I experienced some of the thrills of that hugely interesting task, and tried to realize what it was meaning and was about to mean to me, and couldn't. That was an unreal part of the time for me, when I seemed rather farther removed from the girl than brought into closer relation. There was doubtless shyness between us, despite our eager interest, and my memory holds an uncomfortable mixture of distasteful bargaining and irksome planning that spoiled dreams which might have been sweet. I wonder if it was because calm practical disillusioned Mrs. Brainard was there? I have always felt that it should have been happier, that time of house-planning. But it passed quickly, and there came a time when I was alone in our little prospective home, when Carmen and her mother had gone back to finish wedding preparations, and there was nothing for me to do but wait and fuss about and try to be patient. I moved my meager goods and chattels from my plain boarding-house room to the new apartment and spent the nights there for the sake of welcome solitude. And it was then that I dreamed my dreams.

You would not imagine that a young fellow could have a vital experience over a few odd trunks of clothing, would you? I did. They came that week before our wedding, sent by Carmen's mother, and containing all the trousseau things of the little wife to be. A letter announced their coming and I was naïvely asked to unpack and hang up and store away. And I undertook the task in matter-of-fact fashion.

Keys came in a little package by themselves and I opened the trunks on my kitchen floor, as I had cracked crates of chairs and boxes of books. I tore away paper coverings inside, with willing, not eager, hands. And then, suddenly, I found my unexpected fingers touching things that brought the blood to my face, with the swift sense almost of guilt in unintended but real desecration.

I thought of all women with shyness and reverence. On one lovely girl I looked with adoration. It was a shock to me to lift these silken lacy violet-scented things — fine linen and delicate ribbons — and to know that they were hers. And there was a distinct and actual pang, despite all the thrill in this strange foretaste of coming intimacy, in the sudden realization that there had been no woman's intuitive forevision of the very thing I felt — the thing that the reverent young lover would inevitably

feel over these things that seemed the very pledges of his darling's self-bestowal — thrust, without warning and without reserve, before his unaccustomed eyes.

CHAPTER II

HOMING TOGETHER

NO flower of that June breathed such sweetness as my wonderful little Carmen on our wedding day. She was no pale lily, with her glorious golden head and her glowing cheeks and eyes. Even white satin and snowy tulle and orange blossoms could not take the warmth and sparkle from her. And she was not worn and jaded, either, as seems to be the commonly accepted thing for brides. She had too much bounding life and health in her for that. Imagine a golden rose that carries a touch of pink in its petals, that seems to blush as it ripens and unfolds, and, if girls are to be compared to flowers, that may picture my Carmen.

It was one of those smiling days of soft blue skies and tender green leaves and cool moist breezes, that the most romantic girl might pray for as her wedding day. Every separate thing that might be counted an omen, too, was propitious. It was as if the day and all the things it brought, were made to crown the happiness of the loveliest little creature

under a kindly sun. Clustering friends, glittering gifts, delightful arrangements, with all the little sentimental as well as social accompaniments properly complete, made it a wedding that is talked of yet by all who saw it as one of those few perfect things one sees in a lifetime.

We stood by the altar in little St. Luke's, with a church full of friends at our backs, and made our public promises. I do not know what Carmen felt. Her hand on my arm was warm and untrembling. As for me, the sense of reality and of seriousness was strong and sobering. My passionate fondness for the girl who was giving herself to me, and all the happy circumstances of the giving, could not take away the impressing recognition that here was responsibility for a boy like me to be undertaking. Glad as I was and full of hope and confidence, it seemed like taking things fragile and perishable, indeed, into an unskilled grip. And it was just what I was doing, and is just what every eager boy does when he takes any girl and her happiness — and his own — together into his youthful, untaught, even unadvised control. Boys and girls are taught nothing to prepare them for this the vital part of life, and the foundation of their happiness or their misery. Of course they are novices. They are taught everything else.

There were complacent smiles, if conventional tears, in Mrs. Brainard's eyes, when she came to us after the long ceremony was over. There were smiles and tears, mostly of the same sort, in the faces of Carmen's girl friends. There were knowing looks, if not grins, on the faces of the men, except when there was envy. Some of the fellows who congratulated me would have been glad enough to stand in my shoes. And Arnold Granden was one. I remember very well the stiff look of his face as he talked to Carmen and me, and how he set his lips as he turned away from us. He was deep hurt at my luck. Carmen herself looked a bit pityingly after him, I recall, as he left the house, where our little reception was held, and she squeezed my arm when she saw that I noted her look. "You were always jealous of Arnold, Harry," she said, smiling up at me. "But never any more." And she nestled against me, while her eyes turned to the next congratulator, and she covered her movement by smiling radiantly upon Alice Van Tuyl.

Alice was a friend of both of us. She was not exactly an intimate friend of Carmen. She was one who belonged to the same girls' club. She had been a classmate at school, and she was herself to marry a chap who had once been numbered among Carmen's earlier slaves. She was a gentle girl, of

whom my most vivid impression then was that she was kind, and she was one of the kindest of all the women I have known. She was almost a perfect foil for Carmen in physical appearance, dark-haired, with deep gray-blue eyes, a wholesome figure, rather quiet ways, with nothing brilliant about her, only sound, sweet womanliness, which has charm enough.

Dan Hyatt, her lover, was with her. He was a city fellow, too, and I hoped to have the two somewhere in reach of us — when I hoped for anything so distant as the mingling with friends again seemed to me then. He was in business, publishing, and therefore in a line to give us some common ground, though personally he was not specially attractive to me. He was a virile chap, of sporting proclivities, the sort whom you would expect to find consistently ready with a bet, fond of a stiff drink, clever with a cue, and possessed of a quick eye for a pretty woman; the sort whose keenest interests outside of business are in strong tobacco, his tailor and the pink sheet. It is as useless to speculate as to why his kind and Alice's cast in their lots together, as is all other similar inquiry.

And I remember what Carmen said to Alice. "You'll be with us soon, dear," she laughed in her pretty, jolly, immensely friendly voice. "Won't we have fun?"

"It will be very nice if we can be near *you*," answered Alice, with smiling lips but with gravely observing eyes on my young wife's fair head. Then she looked at me, with a level, honest look of well, wishing and a spontaneous laugh that did me good after the conventionalities of others. "Harry," she said, "nobody need require promises of you to safe-keep your treasure," and she smiled again, almost fondly, at Carmen, as how could she help smiling at that radiant little being. But she looked in my eyes after she said it, with just a bit of the same gravity and a touch of curious inquiry that made me think again of the glance afterwards.

Dan grasped Carmen's slender hand in his big one and shook it heartily. He gave me his left. His eyes took in her loveliness with their characteristic bold look that stopped at nothing. Then he turned to me with knowing intelligence.

"I'll bet on you, too, Harry," he added, so supplementing what Alice had said, but with quite a different suggestion.

I did not like his look at Carmen, nor the spirit of his remark to me; but I knew his kind, and I believed myself capable of keeping what was mine.

I have said nothing of Carmen's father. He was a good quiet gentleman, with whom my acquaintance had never approached familiarity. He seemed to

think well of me and to be quite willing to entrust his beautiful daughter to me. So, naturally, I thought well of him. But I do not even remember what he said to us by way of parting blessing, in the midst of the congratulations and good-byes of friends.

We went away to our train, in the usual showers of rice and confetti, and with the inevitable accompaniment of tricks of the small-town imbecile in shape of white streamers on carriage and trunks and old shoes trailing behind. And we made the usual final escape with the help of the well-sweetened Pullman porter.

It rained a little in the city that night, when we arrived. The unaccustomed luxury of a taxicab from the station through the several long miles home seemed therefore doubly justifiable. Also the homing out of storm added still a warmer feeling of delight to this carrying my little mate to shelter. Each circumstance added poignancy to my happiness. And Carmen, in royal mood of indulgence toward me, responded to me in a gentle, joyous way that seemed to be then fixing the level upon which our relations were to last for all our lives, at a plane above my dreams.

Oh, that soft warm rainy June night! How exquisitely it stands out in memory! Every impression of it is as vivid as to-day — yes, far more vivid.

It was like opening a new door upon a fresh vista of life, when I opened the door of the cool still little apartment that night, and smelled the violets I had ordered for my sweetheart, while I fumbled my way to make a light.

Carmen came in after me. There is a particular worn spot in the floor now, where we always stepped first as we opened the door, on which she stood still that first time and permitted herself to be kissed; and where I have often stood since with a kind of sentimental superstition, and wished my gilded wishes, as we children used to wish when we stepped upon the new board sidewalk and allowed certain little pet hopes of ours, that we wouldn't have dared to voice aloud, to shape into words in our minds. Our first moment alone, we stood there together, she dazzled a trifle by the incandescents after the gloom outside, and I dazzled more by the sudden realization of the long-awaited happiness.

She was quiet. I remember her faint little smile, as she put up her cheek to my kiss, and then her lips at my demand. Her eyes wandered slowly and interestedly about, debatingly upon the room's arrangements, and she turned from my eager embrace leisurely to pull off her gloves and complete her survey. With ready naturalness, too, she reached up to pull out the long hat-pins and take off her

modish hat, with instant suggestion of matter-of-fact at-homeness, of quiet acceptance of the new situation; and she turned to the mirror in our console, to fluff up her hair, with the air of accustomed familiarity. It pleased me. Everything she did pleased me. But it was not just what I had looked for. I had thought of her as shyly expectant, curious, hesitant. She was not that. Neither was she eager. She seemed pleased — content. She buried her small nose in the violets, quite as if they had been brought to her in her own old home.

“You’re a dear boy, Harry,” she said. “You like to do all the lovely thoughtful things for me, don’t you?”

I made some extravagant reply and she smiled again, and then she slipped out of her little silk coat and let me have it and the hat, too, to dispose of for her, while she looked about once more.

I was afire with the sense of her presence then, alone with me, with all the world shut out; but I was most earnestly desirous to give her every gentle attention, to make the home immediately home to her, to take away all of the strangeness and fear she might feel, to make of my affection a shield against any first impression that would mar the perfect sweetness and happiness of this beginning for her. But my anticipation of shrinking distrust

was unfounded. She showed only quick, intelligent and wholly charming interest in the home itself, and nothing seemed to distress her. She was her usual jolly laughing friendly indulgent self.

While I put away the luggage we brought, she went to change from her traveling gown and when she came out to me again, she had put on a negligee of delicate pink that was at once the prettiest and most informal thing I had ever seen her wear. In it her loveliness was at its lovely best, while this first sweet voluntary intimacy was intoxicating to me.

We sat in the big armchair — together. There had been no great amount of lovemaking between us during our courtship, because my standing as accepted lover had been brief and because I had been away from her much of the time. She was not given to demonstration. She had a witching way of making tiny advances, at times, when we were alone, and she responded — always indulgently — to my half-controlled impulses to caress her. She nestled fearlessly down beside me in the soft leather cushions and let me have both her hands in mine. She pressed her warm cheek against mine, with a roguish little inarticulate sound of happy affection. She laughed with only a merry affectation of protest when I drew her almost crushingly close to me; and

then she talked with quick adoption of the planning tone and complete assumption of the direction of our joint affairs, that at once amused and gratified and piqued me.

Of course I wanted just to fondle her and talk endearments and tenderest things; but I wanted more to insure her happiness and so went about it by trying to smother my own too ardent passion to the coolness of content and to indulge the thing she wished to do.

"Harry, won't it be fun?" she said. "We can entertain people so nicely here — just in small informal ways, of course. But these rooms open up so pleasantly. Do you think it is pretty?"

"Sure it's pretty," I answered, trying to look it all over judicially. "It's a bully little place where two people that love each other won't need to be in a hurry to let anyone else in, however."

I kissed her gently, and then ventured to ruffle her hair ever so little, teasingly.

"Oh, don't do that, Hal," she said, pulling my hand down and holding it with both her own, grasping each a finger. "You'll have to learn not to pull your wife's hair down."

"Isn't that one of my rights now?" I asked.

"No, indeed it isn't."

"But I mean to begin by claiming rights," I in-

sisted, pinching the pink lobe of her ear and then hugging her close.

"Be good, now, and listen," she answered, yielding to the hug passively but intent on her own ideas. "We must begin right socially. We must plan to entertain. Of course I don't mean immediately. Not to-night, you know."

She broke off to look up mischievously at me, and then dodged my effort to end the conversation there.

"But I want to think out how we shall manage, and how we shall fix up all our things to make the most of them. Do you suppose, Harry, we could afford to have one of those fine phonograph machines and a few nice records? And do you know, I don't really like this rug. I think I'll change it. You wouldn't mind if we paid just a little more, would you, and get a Persian?"

I suppose these are not just the words she spoke. She said similar things. But it was a babble of affairs — not of affection. I remember the subjects — many of them, for impressions went deep with me that night. I was dissatisfied with practical talk, even while my lovely little wife nestled soft and warm under my very hands and allowed the free expression of my adoration of her except only for occasional playful remonstrance.

I began then first to get her ideas of what our

life was to be. We had had no notion, either of us, about the other's anticipations. Mine, colored now by the experiences of the few weeks before marriage, were roseate visions of all the world for just us two. For me there was no dear desire that did not look for fulfillment in her. My notion of our life together was built of what I supposed to be wishes common to us both. To me our home was enough. To have a cozy place where she and I would be alone, alone, alone — and could do the things we loved together — that was enough. My work outside, her probable social life, these were both but unimportant matters. And I never dreamed that my darling's ideal could be in any way unlike what lured me so.

"You are the loveliest thing in all the world, Carmen," I would say to her over and over, and she would laugh. "We shall be enormously happy together," I would add. And I did not even see the entire selfishness of that conclusion until afterwards.

I began to understand, however, that the interests which attracted her were, at least, wider and more numerous. She looked at our home with the eyes of prospective visitors and found flaws in things that were beautiful to me simply because they were ours. Still, I delighted in the thought that anything I could do or buy for her would add to her pleasure.

And that was my attitude of mind as I listened to her chatter. I perfectly realized that we were apart in our view-points, I looking on this wedded life as a blissful end in itself, attained after long hoping and beyond which even hope need not reach out; she regarding it as a condition that favored the realization of desires for further things. In other words, she was herself all sufficient to me, my prize supreme, while I was, to her, perhaps a strong ally, who would help to reach out after prizes still further on.

I will not say I grasped this that evening while I held that tender little figure in its pink negligee, and tasted my first privileges of possession. I was not in a mood to be analytical. But I felt it, knew that I, the man, was to win and provide more and other things for her, the woman, who was giving me what she already possessed. Not even so clearly as that did I see it, but vaguely and with a resentful denial of so cold a comparison which tried to force itself in where all was love and immense happiness.

Our housekeeping arrangements were simple. We were not to have a maid at first. I, who had cooked and washed dishes in camps and at home, for the fun of it, was expert enough to believe I could materially help my inexperienced housekeeper. Indeed, I helped get ready and put upon the table a

simple little supper that first night, when she found out that she was hungry. Our larder had been stocked with all the essentials for our small beginnings and when we sat opposite each other — over our new dining-table — and she dispensed to me the first cup of coffee, the sense of making things easy for her made my own pride in my skill pleasant to me.

Everyone who is married knows the sweetness of all these first relations. Those who are not, can imagine them. They are all that they are pictured and more. If there are to be flaws in the beauty of the later life together, it is rare for them to appear then. None that I recognized as flaws appeared to me. Why should I see then — how could I, when my eyes were full of the dainty little fair-skinned creature in pink fluff, whose hands upon the table things seemed to leave a perfume on them for me, whose shining eyes seemed to speak back my happiness to me, whose smiling lips promised unspeakable joy in kisses to come.

Yes, I was an infatuated lover — a mad lover. But I am convinced that I was much like most boys. I cannot see that others I have watched show symptoms of being very different. They are half-crazed about the little creatures they marry. The girls themselves know it very well, too; and what a power

it is, those young wives possess, to make or break the happiness of both!

When it grew late and visiting and planning flagged, I made excuse of clearing away dishes and making ready for the morning's breakfast that Carmen might be free of me for a time. And when it was done, I went at last, half diffident, despite my fevered pulse, to our chamber door.

I can hear her voice yet, just as she answered my knock — my timid, awed, but seemingly ruthless, demanding knock.

"Carmen, may I come in now?" I asked.

And she laughed, sweetly, amusedly — indulgently. "Of course, you foolish boy," she answered.

CHAPTER III

THE NEARER ACQUAINTANCE

CARMEN had no foreknowledge of what married life would be like. She had lived through a girlhood carefully shielded from those things that might have taught her any self-knowledge, just as most girls do. After our first twenty-four hours together I had a new comprehension of what complete innocence — and ignorance — mean. Also she was accustomed to the place of favorite daughter in her home, and I found, too, what dependence means. If I felt with the light of the first new day in our wedded life, a fresh sense of the fragility and exquisite loveliness of the little creature entrusted to me, I felt also a conviction that responsibility for the success or failure of this partnership was even more serious than we had supposed. I had been given a beautiful thing, to cherish it and guard it and care for it. The obligation was the price of ownership.

I made the second cup of coffee we had together. I carried in to her a tray with the best breakfast I

could concoct, as a sort of offering in acknowledgment of that obligation I felt. I enjoyed it. There was enough of the feeling that the whole thing was a sort of lark, to make serious consideration of mutual responsibilities, then, seem out of place, indeed. And I bolstered up the pretty golden head of my beautiful girl, with pillows, and spread napkin and arranged tray, with delight in the service; and then I kissed the little white, uncovered shoulder she shrugged up to me, and felt rewarded for my effort.

I brought her the morning paper. Under her direction, then, I unpacked the grips we had brought in with us the night before, which contained mainly the last trinkets gathered up at the home-leaving. There were toilet articles, knickknacks, photographs, odds and ends. Carmen told me where to put them, and I set them about while she divided her attention between my task and the paper's headlines.

"Oh, the paper has nearly a column about our wedding, Hal!" she exclaimed in sudden joy of discovery, in the midst of my labors, and she buried herself in perusal of the account with prompt and complete absorption.

"Read it aloud to me," I suggested, willing to listen, but she was too deeply immersed in her interest to hear me.

It was a trifling thing to bring again to me the sense of separateness I had felt before, but I remember distinctly the renewal of the feeling, as I sat quiet, fumbling over the photographs she had brought and awaiting her pleasure. I began then, I think, to reason things out. Of course she would care for things that I did not deem important. I would doubtless find things I liked to do and think about that would not appeal to her. However, I could not help being slightly disturbed over my preconceived notions of our perfect oneness that I had believed about to be. That notion of a merging of interests is very sweet to a man and is one of the tenderest forevisions.

It was while she was earnestly reading the wedding story that I found Arnold Granden's portrait among her photographs, and grinned over it a little. He was just a bit of a snob, Granden, so I couldn't help some satisfaction in the mere triumph over him in our race for the favor of Carmen. I held the photograph up and spoke to her.

She laid the paper down and looked across at the picture and at me. "Oh, yes," she said. "It's Arnold. Put him on the dresser, Hal — there at the right end."

I laughed. "Going to hang up your string of scalps, Carmen?" I suggested.

"Harry!" she answered. "The idea!" And then suddenly her eyes grew wider. "Just think," she added, "if it hadn't been for you, Arnold might have been my husband — this morning."

I laid the photograph down. That speech jarred. I was instantly aware that it hurt, though I did not know just why. I believed it jealousy then, and I suppose the feeling can be so classed. But the impulse to cover up my feeling, because it would have seemed small and absurd, made me hold on to my grin, so that Carmen did not see any effect of her words.

"Set him up on the dresser, Hal," she persisted, and I did so. "I was pretty fond of him, boy," she went on, nodding at the picture, playfully.

"Does that argue that you were immensely more fond of me?" I asked.

"Doesn't it?" she answered, quizzically. Then she regarded Granden's handsome portrait consideringly. "He's very fine looking," she remarked. "Don't you think he is, Harry?"

I felt no disposition to deny it. But her stating the fact, and choosing such a time to state it, dampened my pleasure in this moment. I busied myself over the other pictures. Among them chanced to be an excellent one of Alice Van Tuyl, and I held it up, unconsciously examining that sweet girl's fine

face. When I looked up, Carmen was smiling frankly.

"I have as good right to be jealous as you have, Harry," she said suddenly.

I was surprised. It had never entered my head to regard Alice Van Tuyl with any personal interest whatever. The implication Carmen made so smilingly exactly supplemented her remark about Granden. For several reasons I did not like it. First, it showed her conception of my love for herself to be somewhat less perfect and ideal than I believed it, and so made me abruptly conscious that her own affection might have its reserves; and it also suggested an opinion of Alice Van Tuyl quite at variance with the opinion I held of her.

But I merely laughed, that I might appear to regard it as a joke. I have been accused of taking everything too seriously and I did not want to lay myself open to such a charge. But I laid Alice's photograph aside.

"I think Dan will get a good wife," I answered. "But I think I have indicated my first choice."

"And I mine," said Carmen, returning to her paper.

Of course that pleased me better, but I felt as one does who has been put in the wrong unfairly, as I went on with the rest of my unpacking. I recount

these small details, not because they are vital but because they show the first turn of the weather-vane in our experience. Human life is made up of millions of tiny trickling streamlets that flow together to give volume and direction and character to its current. If you would understand its sweetness or its taint you must analyze the sources of the tributaries.

With what a curious sense I now look back at that time. Carmen spent nearly the whole of our first day together writing letters.

"I have all our presents to acknowledge, Harry," she announced when I demurred at allowing her such employment.

She put herself into the trimmest and neatest of house gowns and backed up to me for hooking, with smiles and playful pats as rewards for my efforts. Then she plunged into the letter-writing and left me to my own devices. I smoked and read the paper then, with disappointment that this first day was not to be given to some sort of thing in which we could both have a part. I was not asked to suggest how the letters might be written. Of course I could have no part in the writing. I could sit and watch the delicate flying fingers of my wife, admire the beauty of her bent head and the amazing charm of her diminutive person. But those were the bounds of my part. After a half-impatient rebuff or two, I

concluded that the expression of admiration in form of caress was untimely now at least, and so I learned a lesson that was to last. The plane of our living was, indeed, being set and the tone pitched, but not as I had thought.

That day was like so many since, that some of the details of all of them have intermingled inextricably in recollection. Many a time have I sat out a Sunday or a holiday at home while my indefatigable wife followed some pursuit in which I could not join. How absurd it sounds, does it not, after all that has been said of how men are given to excluding their eager wives from their masculine interests? I was the one excluded, and I gradually came to understand that Carmen would be the one to choose how and in what we were to share.

She wrote a great stack of letters that day — that first day of our life together. The small square white envelopes made quite a clutter on her desk. I paid little attention to them or to whom she wrote. Occasionally she would stop to prattle about some detail of the wedding, some oddity of some guest, or a plan for future social doings. Then she would become submerged once more. We had an interlude for a very late luncheon, when I was allowed to help in the preparation and the clearing away, and I found a good deal of satisfaction in that.

And my offer to help wash dishes so that she might early finish her self-imposed task and leave the evening free, was accepted promptly. After our joint task was done, I found some work of my own to do for a time, and I remember just how she looked when I came in after my bit of work was ended and found she had left her desk, at last. Perched in my big armchair, with her feet curled up under her, she sat in the late twilight, with a little silver-mounted manicure set, busily at work in the care of her exceedingly well-kept nails. Her attitude looked sociable, and I sat down to the first visit of the day, while I learned another thing. Conversation was a suitable accompaniment for manicuring.

I have grown amused at her at times. Traits that seem childlike — essentially feminine, I suppose — were hers. This busy, busy way of employing minutes and giving herself completely to her occupation of the time was one of the things both amusing and charming. To be sure she always looked so wholly adorable over any kind of industry, she was always so pretty and so bright and so graceful that she made anything she chose to do seem a fit and charming employment. I found her always ready to talk, when the work did not require absolute concentration, but quite as unready for affectionate demonstration. Indeed, practically the first thing

I learned about Carmen was that she liked to do things of her own selecting and did not like to be interrupted.

The second thing I learned was less amusing to me. We went out together, when evening had come on, and took the stack of letters with us. Carmen had carefully stamped them all, but there was more than a comfortable handful of them, so she entrusted the mailing to me. I certainly had no notion of censoring her correspondence, as I stood by the mail-box putting in the letters, and it was only the chance discovery that one seemed overheavy for a two-cent stamp, that made me look twice at the envelope and learn that it was addressed to Granden.

Whether Carmen noted my momentary hesitation over the heavy envelope, I have never known. She did not show that she did and, after a moment, occupied in pushing the last of her mail into the box, I had made up my mind that it was unfair of me to take exception to what she might want to do. Surely I could trust this girl I had married, even if I did not just like it that her letter of acknowledgment of an old flame's gift should be extra heavy, or that she should have a sentiment about preserving his photograph. Nevertheless I felt a chill of displeasure that made me grave in spite of my conservative judgment. And, as it is a fault of mine that

I am not good at rising above a pique, I suppose I showed it. I was more or less silent on our walk and Carmen seemed to be less vivacious than common, and I became rather miserable for a man just married to the sweetest, most beautiful girl in the world. So it was not till we were back in our apartment again, with shut doors and drawn shades, that the opportunity for new kisses and caresses thawed the small freeze in my heart. Nothing in me could resist the touch of her lips, however, and so our day ended happily for me, because she chose to give.

CHAPTER IV

GIVING AND TAKING

THERE must be many details I cannot tell of the commonplaces of our life, but what I have related of our first day was soon to be recognized as characteristic of all.

Carmen could give — royally, bounteously — she did, at first. She learned quickly wherein lay her power. Of course she knew, before, that she held a mysterious sway, but now, with discovery of the strange nature of man on which she could play, her grip of the scepter became surer. She learned that the affection of her husband was very genuine and that it would stop at nothing in giving her of his possessions. She learned of some of his demands, but she also learned that he thought her his queen and that he considered it his privilege to serve. She learned that many of his expectations of what she was to be and give, were nebulous, and that she was to have a share in forming them. She learned that he was gentler than she had expected, and that the whole tenor of her life was more

thoroughly in her own hands than she had supposed.

After my first day with her I began to know that I must watch to understand what her exact attitude was. I was groping. So was she, for she did not solve all her problems successfully. She read the surface of me quite correctly. She knew that her own personal loveliness held a mighty influence over me. She knew that pride in her, the desire to make her life easy and happy and comfortable would be a continual unfailing factor in all I would do. She discovered my patience, of which I have some fund. And she found that I looked upon my pledge to cherish and care for her as upon a holy promise, a sacred, life-long obligation, in which there could be no shirk or failure or shortcoming, as a matter of honest conscience. So she understood that her power went into deeper root than the physical. And she accepted what I offered and began to choose among her riches for a suitable return. The thing she did not understand clearly was that I fathomed her own feeling, and the thing she did not grasp was the one thoroughly shaped anticipation I had possessed as to what was to be our partnership. For partnership was what I had believed we were entering upon.

The first days passed swiftly, while we studied

each other and made discovery, and the process extended to trifles, too. Nothing in personal habits is too small to have an influence on marital happiness. I found that she was all neatness and cleanliness personified, so far as her own individual self was concerned. I found that all the sunny, golden hair was her very unpadded own. I found that every lovely curve of her beautiful figure was a real gift of nature and not of the modiste. I found that her taste in toilette preparations was discriminating and luxurious. I learned that she was fond of the good things to eat and of pretty things to wear for their own sake; that she loved ease only moderately well, for she was a vigorous little person, full of ambition and love of action.

Then I found that she was capable of dropping a slim slipper in the middle of the living-room floor and forgetting it there. She found it hard to keep dust from collecting in some out-of-the-way nooks in the dark spots of the house. She was more concerned over the condition of her hands than of the kitchen refrigerator. She felt that she did me a distinct favor when she remembered to wrap up my linen for the laundry driver. She hated the sound of whistling about the house and would not tolerate cigar ashes in her vases. She liked to have me do the marketing, and would call me up at the

office to detail to me what she wanted me to buy, rather than order direct by 'phone from the neighborhood stores.

Those are a few of the things. As for me, she found that I was careless about keeping my clothes properly pressed, but reasonably orderly about hanging things up. I was not irritable over accidents but likely to become silent and grave if criticised. I was not greatly concerned over expense within the income, but likely to wear a frayed tie because my pet economy was in that direction. I rarely got up ugly in the morning but was capable of showing some plain irritation if my letters were not where I could lay my hands on them when I came in at night. I did not insist on dinner on time or grow peevish over a wait while she dressed. But I insisted on having my razor-strop on the bathroom door-knob. I was likely to be bitter in anger, but never ungentle when my strength was turned toward her. Nothing distressed me more than "fibbing," as women call it, but I would smoke more than was good for me and then deny it indignantly.

We were two humans. We were very vulnerable from any standpoint of criticism. I was inconsistent and so was she. And every one of the matters I have mentioned exerted their influence on our relations. You take a part of your opinion

of a man from the way he squints in the sun; of a woman from her air on entering a crowded car. You judge a boy by the amount of blacking on his shoes and a girl by evidence of her attitude toward chewing gum. Your confidence in another is influenced by the newspaper you see him read or by the fineness of her handkerchief. Can the new husband and wife fail to judge each other by the sum of these things? The result is wholly a matter of the spirit in which it is done and of the primary attitude of mind.

But we were not a fault-finding pair. I picked up Carmen's slipper and put it where she would find it next time. She made a place for my letters and laid them there. She learned that I would pick the slipper up and I that she would take precautions about the mail. Then came the further test of each as to the degree of tolerance and the balance of qualities; and then the impulse to efforts at adjustment. It was but a short time, indeed, before I learned to anticipate the look of distaste in my wife's eyes over certain portions of the housework, and to recognize the relief with which she welcomed my aid. It was not long before I grasped the importance of taking care of the small hands of which I was as proud as she, and which dishwater and dust-cloth and cleaning powders

would quickly roughen and discolor. It was only a few days before I found out that it is very hard for a girl who shops in a big city to get home in time to have dinner on the table at 6:30, and that matinees are not mere amusements but real necessities to the woman who has yet to make wide social acquaintance. Of course, I could not endure the annoyed or distressed or lonely look in Carmen's eyes, and so, of course, I took the obvious steps to save her from these things from which I could save her.

I could not find it in my heart to expect the girl I so adored to get up at my early hour in the morning when I went back to daily work and get a breakfast for me. Having seen sleepy eyes look piteously at the clock on the dresser and then close again in dreamy weariness for the "one more nap," I could not brutally reawaken my beloved little lady to the menial task of serving me a morning meal. I could find pleasure rather in going on to get her breakfast myself and carrying in a tray to her, in anticipation of the smiles that another hour of sleep and this little attention would add to the lovely face. It was a small thing, at most, and I preferred to carry all day the vision of the smiles rather than the vision of a frail, tired girl, who already felt the weight of her relation to me as a burden.

So we established a custom, and an elastic one. That is to say, it was elastic in one direction. What I did once or twice to spare my dainty wife, I continued to do, to spare her; and she, who showed high appreciation at the start, grew to feel that the care and protection she received were a part of what I expected to give as my share of the joint home-making. She was fond of praising me. I cannot forbear reference to a humorous line that doubtless came from some theatrical satire and that lingers in my memory as being more or less applicable to my case. "Flatter me, and I'll work like ——," said the funny man of the piece, and the phrase always got a laugh. I laugh at it now, as I write. Carmen knew the sort of flattery I liked. It was the assurance of her affection.

Of course a woman who has no servants and has a house to keep must have help. It was the recognition of that which made me eager to help my wife. But no man who works all the business hours of the day helps in the housework mornings and evenings from choice. So a maid was the inevitable result. We were lucky to get a competent one who lived outside and came to work in time to get Carmen's late breakfast. I stopped waking her at all, then, and missed the kisses and smiles of that early morn-

ing hour. But she seemed to like better to be undisturbed.

I used to stand over that little golden head on the pillow those summer mornings before I left the house, hold back a curtain and look down at the shining hair where the early daylight touched it like a special caress from the sun himself, and at the soft lashes that seemed so lightly drooped over the eyes I loved, and think unspeakably tender things of the sweet girl whose comfort and peace I was so eager to secure; and I harbored no critical feeling toward her and was only faintly aware, if at all, that I was less than satisfied with what I was finding in our life together.

It was not what I gave that dissatisfied me, even to that degree, be sure. It is in giving that love finds its chief satisfaction. Nothing makes a lover so happy as to shower his loved one with services. Nor was it lack of return that gradually began to hurt. I have said that simply the loveliness of the little creature herself was my reward, and she was mine in all her wonderful beauty. But the thing that cut gradually in to the quick, through my none too thin skin, like the slow cut of a knife that is under gradually increasing pressure, was the growing acceptance as matters of course of what I found a joy

in doing as special indulgences from out of my great affection. It is a matter of course that a man shall be the bread-winner. It is a matter of course that he shall do the heavy work. It is a matter of course that he shall face danger if danger is to be faced and bear the brunt of the harder things to be borne. He expects no thanks for these. But for indulgences and for careful forethought, for gifts and tender remembrances, for the assumption of cares and of tasks that are distinctly not his own, he wants special returns and affectionate appreciation. I once told Carmen that all a man wants in return for all he can give a woman, is appreciation. That is why I laugh — rather mirthlessly, I confess — over that quoted line about flattery. But Carmen modeled her ideas of what I wanted, not upon a chance remark like that, but upon the daily life, in which I was too fond at first, and then, too proud, to ask for what she did not choose to give.

I am advancing my story rapidly. It took me days to discover that the difference really existed between what I had expected and what I had found, in my wife. It required weeks to learn that Carmen's attitude was based upon strong preconceptions and upon my own ways. And certainly it never occurred to me that the shaping of our hap-

piness depended on anything more than complete devotion on my part. What more could a man give than devotion?

Meanwhile other things were happening. In the first place, it was a successful year for me in a business way. My work was telling and I seemed to have found work for which I was fitted. Business came to me suddenly and income increased quickly. June, July and August were hot, hard months but they were prosperous months. I worked very hard and was tired, of course, at the ends of the days and of the weeks. My energy went into my business. So I found the pace I had set at home just a little hard to keep. The first difficulty was so simple as to be absurd. Carmen slept late in the morning and often took a nap in the long warm afternoons. Of course she was not so fagged as I at night. Of course, too, she was more eager to go out in the evening and minded late hours little. Ready to indulge her in this, as in other things, I found the actual physical task a strain.

I first felt this with the first absence of Carmen from home. It was August when she made her first visit to her mother and it was in that week that I "slept up" and found that it had been sleep I needed rather than any of the other things a man is likely to think he needs when he is tired out. I

discovered that I had been losing some of my effectiveness and good spirits, which were quickly regained as soon as I had a proper amount of rest. I recognized, too, that I could not afford the drain I had been allowing. I felt fairly guilty in the discovery, for it seemed like a kind of disloyalty to my dear wife even to think that a desire of hers could cost more, in devotion, than I was willing to give. But I began to understand that what I was trying to do might become too great a burden. I could not deny that I found Carmen's absence a relief, to just the extent that it enabled me to rest. My heart was no less fond. Indeed, I was lonely and inclined to be blue without my sweet companion. I longed for her. I missed her more than I would have dreamed I could miss her, even with my extravagance of affection. It was during that time that I found myself willing to kiss the very clothes she wore, where they hung in her closets, silent, but dainty and sweet-scented reminders of her. I have done it often — and it is not one of the things a man tells about. I write it now to show my fondness. I loved that girl, and I had no reserves in my heart.

I went to my lonely bed at night and lay dreaming of the sweet little companion who had occupied it with me during these three wonderful months and recognizing how terribly empty all the world would

be now without her. But I slept soundly and woke with a fresh vigor for work that I had been losing because of my wish to do everything for that same loved girl. And then, when Carmen extended the length of her absence to go to a lake resort not far from our old home, I found it almost unendurable to be longer without her. Having had my vacation for the season, however, at the time of our marriage, I could not spare even a day to run away after her, and so, during the second week she was gone, I suffered quite as much from sheer loneliness as I had before from fatigue. It sounds childish, doesn't it? I think I've never grown up, in some ways. I wonder if any man ever does, so far as such things are concerned. Her small letters, that came each second day, and that were bright and lively enough, were the making of the evenings after their arrival, and I was dismal on the off nights. I had no patience with any thought of seeking amusement down town. I took little interest in the theater, if I must go alone, and no other form of play attracted me at all. So I read myself sleepy each night, and turned in with a sense of killing time till my wife should return. And there was no virtuous sense of devotion to her during her absence upon me. It was just that I wanted Carmen and nothing else.

When she came back, the joys of our first wedded

days returned with her. Indeed, I am not sure that it was not a sweeter time, that period after her first absence, than our first month together. To me it was like return to what had been a delicious dream of delight, which had been rudely interrupted. And she seemed pleased all over again with my huge happiness in her. She seemed to be more than prodigal in her lenient indulgence toward me, even more affectionate than ever. She seemed to be more my own and more contented to be so.

She told me of good times while away but insisted that she had missed me, "her boy," as she called me. She appeared quite satisfied to be back in the hot city, even, and to hold no regrets for the lake-country's charms. And naturally I drew the flattering conclusion. There was upon her, too, a greater spirit of gayety than usual. She seemed freer and gave greater rein to her high spirits. She was positively joyous, as if complete satisfaction with her new life was just beginning to rise to enthusiasm — as if she were just finding out what it meant.

I was quick to conclude that a part of her renewed pleasure was due to my own renewed spirits and vigor, for I felt that I was a better companion after my rest and more ardent in love than when I had been worn and weary. If the ardency of a man's affection has anything to do with woman's

love of him, as I have speculated, this was an explanation. And whether the physical attraction is to be accredited as a powerful ingredient in this love of ours, or not, it may be understood that the fagged-out lover is at a disadvantage.

I had always found Carmen a modest little thing. She was careful at the beginning in her dress about the house. She wore things that were beautiful in themselves and wonderfully seductive as garments for her exquisite person. But she had never been careless of self-exposure. It was at this time that I began to notice a slight letting down of the bars, as it were. One night, I remember, she lay on the divan, in the pink negligee thing, after the hour was late enough so that none of our few calling friends would be likely to come in; and allowed her loose covering to fall as it would, with so little of her usual regard to decorum, that it was quickly noticeable. I felt the double effect. Attracted by her beauty but just a little displeased at her carelessness, I made some playful allusion — that I intended to be gentle, too — to the matter. And her response was a deliberately mischievous touch of daring that silenced my criticism by its instant appeal alike to my vanity and my senses.

“Aren’t you my husband, Harry?” she asked, with a little careless flirt of her silken gown that

added nothing to the protection it furnished. Then she laughed up in my face as I approached and bent over her in willing response to her challenge.

I did not quite understand. I think I do now. Perhaps you will when I have told all my story. But from that night she was never quite the same that she had been. There was more of the challenge constantly about her — more recklessness. I felt more than one distinct shock from it, and tempted out of my own carefully imposed self-control, I was half pleased by it. But the pleasure was definitely tinged with discomfort at times, in a sense that my wife was losing something — something that, after all, I would rather have her keep.

September was the month in which Dan Hyatt and Alice Van Tuyl were married. They came to live near us — only two blocks away, indeed, and on our street. So we were soon visiting back and forth. I remember a number of evenings of bridge, after the newly wedded pair were settled. They seemed to like us to come, and we certainly enjoyed them. The women, I suppose, exchanged notes on the married condition. Alice appeared to be the same sweet, quiet, keen-visioned girl, married to her sport of a husband, that I had always thought her, and I wondered as much at the union as ever I wondered at any. But she was very friendly to

Carmen and I looked to see them get on well together. Dan and I had enough in common to make our intercourse over cigars and cards passably entertaining to us both. But we had no interchange of views on wedded experience. We saw no reason for discussion, and I suppose he felt as I did that our experiences would be unlike.

But it was from Dan I had my first news that made me open my eyes in real question at Carmen.

"I see Granden has come back to the city," he said to me casually, one night as we smoked together after dinner at his house, while our wives visited in the living-room scarcely beyond sound of our voices.

"So?" answered I, uninterested. "I did not know he had left."

Dan paused in the midst of a puff at his cigar and looked curiously at me. Then he replied carelessly.

"Oh, yes," he said, "I thought you knew about his farming experiment over at Lake Constance."

Lake Constance was where Carmen had spent her brief outing a few weeks before. She had not told me and I had not known that Granden was there. I suppose I showed the course of my thoughts in my face, for, presently, Hyatt was grinning at me.

“ He tells me he found too much social entertainment this summer to make a success of experimental farming,” added my host, with assumption of entire innocence of malice.

CHAPTER V

THE RIFT IN THE LUTE

I AM not of a jealous disposition, I think. Of course I saw the significance of Dan Hyatt's grin and of his hasty change of manner when he saw that his suggestion had reached me. I made the endeavor to cover the fact that he had succeeded in stirring even my attention beyond the casual and I may or may not have succeeded.

What I felt immediately was a sort of start of the consciousness over the discovered fact that Granden and Carmen must have been together at some of those "social entertainments" at Lake Constance, and that my wife had never mentioned his name to me after her return. Following this quickly, was a sense of disgust with myself that I should allow the little series of indications of Carmen's attitude toward Granden to group themselves in my mind at all upon this news or to suggest the necessity for explanation. Was I to be a jealous fool? That was my first question to myself. And for the thousandth time I tried to school myself to the expecta-

tion that any man with as pretty a wife as mine must expect that other men will be interested in her — and without offense. Besides, I was broad enough to admit that a beautiful girl, single or married, has a right to accept some of the innocent homage offered her — involuntarily offered, perhaps — and who should say that the fact of a man's early regard for a woman should bar him as a friend after her marriage? I felt that it could only be a sign of conscious failure to hold my wife's affection if I doubted her perfect loyalty, and my pride repudiated that, naturally. I believed that a man who has won a woman's love should be able to keep it, if he is honest in his own affection and faithfulness. For I believed in the steadfastness of woman's love.

I had been watching the beginnings of married life between Alice and Dan. It looked happy to me. Alice, who had always been a comely, wholesome girl, seemed to bloom anew in her new circumstances. She was not beautiful, in the same sense in which Carmen was. If comparison between them were possible, I might say Carmen's loveliness was of the radiating, dazzling sort, like the brilliant sparkle of dancing water in the sun. Alice's was like the quiet, cool beauty of its blue still depths. Carmen was tempting; Alice attractive. Carmen was fascinating; Alice gracious. Carmen was viva-

cious, mischievous, daring; Alice companionable, understanding, loving. Both were charming women, but wholly different. Carmen always had many men at her feet, and few women intimates; Alice had many women friends, and received respectful liking rather than eager attention from men.

These are the fruits of my later analysis, of course. No newly married man, who loves as I loved, makes comparisons at all. He contrasts — and every contrast is a complete eclipse.

But I saw Alice's devotion to her husband and Dan's satisfaction in her. I saw the shine of happiness in the wife's eyes and the sign of it in her home. I saw the earnestness of her, the absorption in homely affairs, the self-effacing support of her husband's interests, the half-conscious bowing to his tastes and opinions. I saw the competence of her management of wifely matters and the evidence of resulting comfort, and I saw undemonstrative affection and unconsciousness of personal charm combined in a manner toward the man she loved that made a wonderful appeal to watchers.

Carmen was in highest spirits that night, I recall perfectly. She was playful. When we were together again, after my talk with Dan, she sat on the arm of my chair, rumbled my hair, and nestled like the kitten she was, and talked learnedly of mar-

ried life to our less experienced friends. She was more demonstrative than ever, and more amazingly charming. The touch of her, in voluntary affection, had not lost its fire for me. Her arm across my shoulders, with the warm flesh touching my neck put thrall upon me. The very contact with her and the fondling drew all possible sting from any wound Dan's news may have made, for the time. She held the key of me then, assuredly. It was as if she touched some spring in my nature that she had found and of which I was ignorant. Was it a spring of sense only, and was I simply a sensualist? I do not believe it though the very breath of her, sweet as honey and dew to me, was like lotus to my disturbed peace. What could I think about such a ravishing little being, whose one thought seemed to be fondness for me? I thought the self-flattering thing, of course, and the infatuated thing, and the thing the very physical stir in me called for. I thought the loving, indulgent thing. Not only would I not doubt her love but I would trust her to play where and when and with whom she liked. That was the mood she put upon me by her caress. And, without a word between us on the matter or even knowledge of it on her part, the threat of distrust was ended like a trifling cut that heals under a grateful lotion.

We went home that night, walking under a bright round moon, with hands interclasped and bubbling joyousness that surely seemed to me mutual and caused by our content with each other. Such are my fragmentary and vivid recollections.

I do not remember just how soon afterwards it was, but it was soon, that I spent a day at home sick — just sick enough to stay at home. A dressmaker was in the house with Carmen, so it was necessary for her to be closer kept than usual. She was fond of pretty clothes, as I have said, and, of course, I loved to give her all I could afford. That fall we were prosperous, and I had encouraged her to spend, with perfect content that my beautiful girl should be beautifully dressed.

There were suits and coats in making at tailors' establishments down town, of course, for Carmen was not provincial enough to depend on a woman's work at home. But there were gowns and things of other sorts that were to be made in the house, and the place was a litter of fine fabrics of gorgeous colors. Carmen reveled in color and that season's dictations of style justified it, so the things she had were of the riotously joyous sort. And I liked them quite as well as she.

But I remember that day for the conversation it brought up rather than for the clothes in making,

though the one originated in the other. Carmen was clever with her fingers. She herself could sew and it was one of the curious and, to me, astonishingly admirable things about her, that she loved it. She was at work on one of her own pretty garments, when the first remark, that opened our odd discussion, popped out of her mouth quite without preliminary.

"Alice can't sew, Harry."

The tone and emphasis instantly suggested comparison with her own accomplishment and with a subtle hint at a self-defense of some sort, quite uncalled for so far as I was concerned.

"Can't she?" answered I.

"She gets breakfasts and does without a maid, but she can't make any of her own clothes."

I laughed then. "Well, what of it?" I asked her.

"Oh, nothing," answered Carmen with characteristic inconsequence, "only you think she is such a wonder."

"I don't."

"Of course you do. I can see it in your eyes."

My small wife's pretty head came up suddenly at this, and her wonderful blue eyes fixed themselves on me with a strange expression of resentment in them. I was a trifle startled.

"Why," said I, "you like Alice Van Tuyl as well as I!"

"Alice Hyatt," corrected Carmen, coolly.

"Don't you?" I insisted, ignoring her remark that seemed merely unnecessary accuracy at the moment.

"No; I don't."

My wife bent to her work again with seeming sudden impatience at me.

"I think of Alice exactly as I always have," I asserted. "She's one fine girl, and she is going to be the making of Dan Hyatt."

"Humph!"

"What does that mean? I thought you liked her, too."

"Of course you did. I don't show all my feelings in my face."

It was an astonishingly disagreeable remark for Carmen, and I was silent. She was sometimes critical of me, but rarely had she been sarcastic in our short experience together.

We sat by our living-room front windows, on the third floor above the street. The September haze was in the air, with the sunshine coming through it, and the light was on Carmen's hair as I loved to see it. Sitting bent over her work, with her favorite

foot curled up under her, her round little body in a pretty, close-fitting house dress of pink, seeming like a small plump bird just perched and poised for warbling rather than like a busy woman, she was a picture, as usual. The sunniness of her suggested anything but spiteful sayings or unpleasant feelings toward anyone else in the world.

I was slightly nettled, for the tone was contemptuous. But I tried to cover it as was always my habit with Carmen when expression of my feelings might jar our peace. Still a bit of resentment crept into my words.

"Well, Carmen, I didn't know you objected to my admiring Alice — or any other friend of yours."

She shot me a quick glance of more entire disgust than I had ever seen from her.

"Object!" she repeated, scornfully, and stopped as if that were enough said.

Again her manner stung. If it had not, I am confident the obvious parallel would never even have come into my mind. As it was, I thought of the week at Lake Constance, with what seemed almost irrelevance, for I had no occasion for or sense of the necessity for self-defense.

"I have never objected to your friendship for other men, Carmen," I said, as mildly as my mood

would allow. "It seems at least uncalled for that you should speak in an accusing tone of my interest in Alice Van Tuyl."

I used the girl's maiden name inadvertently again. I was unaccustomed as yet to her new one. Carmen's eyes narrowed as I had never seen them do before, but she spoke slowly.

"Alice Van Tuyl has become Mrs. Dan Hyatt, Harry," she said pointedly. "And — what do you mean by other men? *What* other men?"

I cannot say why my anger flamed up. The knowledge of her old partiality for Arnold Granden and of her recent communications with him, together with her references to an honest liking, which I supposed she had always known I entertained for Alice, in a manner that seemed to me wholly unwarrantable, set my temper afire. I had only enough self-control to keep my voice level, and, for that very reason, my tone was probably the more nasty.

"Arnold Granden, for instance," said I.

Her blue eyes opened a little wider. That was the only sign she showed. We regarded each other quietly for a moment, then she turned again to her work.

I was instantly sorry and felt myself the fool.

"Carmen," I said impatiently, "we are bordering on a foolish misunderstanding."

She shrugged her pretty shoulders and smiled without venom.

"It seems to me we are on the edge of a wholesome understanding," she replied. "You've been resenting my friendship with Arnold Granden and I have just found—," she hesitated, "what might be called a parallel for it in you, Harry."

I liked that as little as some of the other things she had said. Have you ever felt the stir to perverse following of a course that you were all the time aware was unwise, and have you ever yielded to it under the very sense of your un wisdom? I did just that on this occasion.

"Carmen," I said, unsure even then that I meant to mention the subject, and sure that I was a fool to do so, but going on nevertheless, "why didn't you tell me you were writing to Arnold and that you saw him at Lake Constance?"

The work my wife was doing went down into her lap and she faced me once more. Her fine eyes were full of withering contempt now and she sneered outright.

"Oh," she said, very softly, "she told you that, did she?"

It took my breath and I simply stared at her without reply. She regarded me with a curiously examining look. At last, she laid aside her work and

rose to her feet. I thought she was about to yield to an outburst, but she simply left me to go into another room where her dressmaker was sewing. She did not come back for some time.

I had opportunity to think over what had been said, but my anger did not cool. I was miserable over the sudden tearing off of the velvet soft cover that had been over the surface of our relations, but the things I had found now that the cover was off did not make me wholly regret the revelation. When Carmen came back, I spoke at once.

"Carmen, I had no idea of questioning your friendship with Arnold till you questioned my honest liking for Alice."

"Honest!" interjected my small wife, tartly, not to imply that I was not so, but to ridicule my insistence upon it.

"I resent your charge," continued I, "that Alice ever told me anything about your relation with Granden. She has never even hinted that she knew, and I would not have listened if she did. She isn't capable of it and you know it."

"Do I?" asked Carmen.

"I saw the letter you wrote to Granden after the wedding," I went on, passing her question, "and Dan told me, casually and unintentionally the other night, that Granden was at Lake Constance

while you were there. I asked you no questions about these things."

Carmen was looking steadily at me from where she had stationed herself by the window.

"You saw my letter to Arnold, after the wedding, did you? Well, did you enjoy the fruits of your spying?"

"Spying, Carmen! What do you mean?"

"You say you saw my letter. You couldn't have seen it without spying."

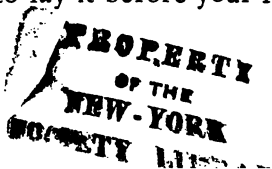
She had grown a little more grave than earlier and her manner denoted unwonted seriousness; but I saw, then, only that she had misunderstood me.

"I mean that I saw the envelope addressed to Granden, on the night after we came home here, and noticed that the letter was a heavy one. I never saw the letter itself. But remember, too, Carmen, that that was the day — that first day of our married life — that you had insisted on having Arnold's photograph on your dresser. Then try to think how I naturally felt to learn that you had had meetings with Granden that you had not told me of."

"Clandestine meetings," she supplemented angrily.

"I didn't say that."

"You are thinking it and you are making out a case. Going to lay it before your lawyer, Harry?"



This seemed a new offense to me, but I did not answer at once. I felt that we were both saying things we would regret. Presently I said so.

"Carmen, I feel like a fool," I told her. "I had no notion of trying to make out a case of anything. I was hurt because of what seemed lack of frankness on your part and stung anew by your implications about Alice. I have said more than I meant to. Maybe you have, too. Let's forget it."

"People don't forget such things when they are once said," she answered promptly.

She left me again presently and as she showed no sign of coming back, I went presently to our bedroom to lie down, for my head was aching and our wretched discussion had not benefited its condition. I did not expect to sleep when I stretched out on the couch, but next I knew I was opening my eyes in the dark to the soft touch of kisses and felt my darling's hands on my cheeks and her soft pliant little body freely lying against mine. My headache gone with my several hours of sleep, I responded instantly to this sort of offer of reconciliation, and our first approach to a real quarrel ended with eager embraces.

After that it was only natural that I should be loath to approach the subject of Granden or to seem to hold any special admiration for Alice. When either was mentioned, therefore, I always felt con-

scious and tried to show that I cared not in one way or another about either. The result was, probably, that I showed how the whole conversation lingered in my mind and made quite apparent to Carmen the course of my thoughts.

But it was not my fault that the discussion bore the fruit it did. That was a bitter dislike on Carmen's part for Alice. Whether it was all founded on the suspicion that Alice had had a part in comment made on what she, Carmen, had done at Lake Constance, or whether the thing was simply the natural repulsion of the temperaments of the two women, I cannot say. I found Carmen's dislike for Alice in a hundred ways and saw it grow. I was sorry but I saw how impolitic it would be to try to change that tide. We did not break with Dan and Alice, understand. We remained ostensibly friends. But Carmen was no friend to Alice from that day of our quarrel.

If I add that no more was I friend to Granden, I think I shall be understood — by the men, at least, among my readers. If Granden wanted to pursue the intimacy with my wife, my house was not closed to him. There was no reason so far as I was concerned for secrecy. I could not see that there was other reason for it.

Meanwhile I was only courteous to Alice Hyatt,

only friendly to her husband and quite separated from any closer relation to either of them. Carmen went out with Alice to afternoon affairs, shopped with her, lunched with her. She invited the two to dine with us often. And Alice accepted. Whether the latter saw that the friendship of my wife was a sham, I cannot say. She showed no sign, but steady kindness at which I wondered in secret.

CHAPTER VI

SOMETHING LESS THAN PARADISE

I WAS enormously proud of Carmen. It was through no lack of delight in admiration for her from others, men or women, that I disliked the Granden affair. When the new fall clothes were ready and my wonderful little wife seemed to take on a sudden new accession of modishness that did not in the least detract from her natural beauty, and when I saw that everybody else saw her loveliness as I did, I was happy about it. It flattered my vanity, too, of course. To be known as the husband of a raving little beauty, has its complimentary side. Perhaps it was unnatural that I did not begin to dress and act the part, but I have always despised the fop and had a horror of approaching his methods. So I continued to be rather plain.

This was another source of disagreement between Carmen and me. She urged me to give more attention to dress, and to go with her to more of the places where dress, as such, was to be appreciated. We were not in society, of course. Our origin and

achievements so far, were much too humble for the very smart people to take us up. So the theater and the tea rooms and the grills of the great hotels were our show places. Such an admission would have horrified and disgusted Carmen, but we were like hundreds of other people in the big cities, who, having no other places to swagger, haunt the public parades in the avenues and the hotels. Of course this meant dining down town, frequently. It meant the gradual cultivation of cocktail-highball habits.

It was highly entertaining and pleasant to me for a very few times. Then I found that whisky made me want to play and not work, and so I couldn't set much value on it, because I wanted very much to succeed in a field where work is essential. So Carmen could persuade me less and less often to take afternoon half-hours or evening hours for this type of diversion. The result was — Isobel.

Isobel Grail was a tall, dark, exceedingly handsome young married woman, who lived near us, and whom Carmen had met at some tea or small neighborhood reception. She was of the stunning kind and really almost as much of a beauty in her way as Carmen was in hers. I confess I did not like her. She was a hard, selfish, spoiled sort. She had had some sort of trouble with her husband and belonged to a crowd of somewhat roystering boys and girls

younger than herself, who were fond of fast driving in hired or borrowed automobiles and of rather noisy supper parties in Mrs. Grail's flat.

Just how Carmen and Isobel began their chumming I can't say. I found my wife lonely, sometimes, after I began to fight shy of the promenade style of entertainment, and when Isobel began to cultivate the acquaintance, I did not discourage it, because Carmen needed a chum. Why my wife should prefer a woman like Mrs. Grail to Alice Hyatt, I could not see, but I feared that it was partly my fault that the friendship with Alice was no longer welcome, and so I felt that I should be careful of my attitude in new relationships. As weeks went by, and fall drifted toward winter, the intimacy between Isobel and Carmen grew to a veritably almost constant companionship, to the exclusion of Alice. And my principal feeling about it was one of relief in the release it gave me and the consciousness that Carmen was having a good time.

There were matinees galore that winter, and teas — or varicolored mixed drinks — afterwards, late home dinners as a consequence, or telephone summonses to me at the office to meet my busy girl at some café for dinner there and theater to follow. I felt the old weariness return when there was too much of this and there was likely to be too much

of it about every second week if I did not remonstrate. And when I did, there was a rather dull evening or two at home, for Carmen never cared much to read with me and had few resources for self-entertainment, when her sewing and bathing and manicuring were over. Consequently these dull evenings grew somewhat hateful to us both. So out we would go again, after a pair of them, and drink and eat and parade and criticise again, with a little attention to the plays we heard as a leaven for the lump.

It is like a peacock party — one of those dinners in a public café or a hotel dining-room — except that the cocks are mostly hens in the human gatherings. It's a matter of graceful posing and preening, with some good things to eat and the pleasant exhilaration from wine as accompaniments. But there's a reason underneath both that I was too blind to see at first, till I found women's eyes unexpectedly — when I had time to spare from regarding my wife — and learned the secret from them. After that I saw men's eyes, with looks in them that did not aid the peace of my mind, fixed with like expression on my Carmen and on Isobel, when she was with us, and I learned still more from them. And I saw my little golden-head learn to preen and pose and sparkle also, with half-awakened eyes but with

no knowledge of how to substitute a better thing. She was happier in this than at home. We had no way to cultivate a social life of another sort. So what was the alternative? I must give my girl pleasure. So, after a while, there came a time when Isobel and men friends of hers formed evening parties from which I could beg off while Carmen could still go. And I found a book and a pipe and bed comfortable things, compared with the game they played.

Of course I missed Carmen now. It was not at all what I had planned — this sort of life. But again I saw quite clearly that it was my fault. Business must monopolize my day and I must rest at night. So I could not be my wife's constant companion, in her pursuit of entertainment. I looked about me and saw other men's wives in the same sort of thing, and felt that my disquiet over some features of it was finical. Besides, as I have said, I was determined to trust Carmen now. Having had one mean experience of the beginnings of a misunderstanding, I wanted no more, for I had been unhappy quite out of proportion to the apparent cause.

Meanwhile, it was my joy to indulge my girl. I often bought theater tickets for her myself and I do not mean to imply that I never went with her. I

did, of course, often, and she seemed to want me to go. I bought her little presents, too, small bits of jewelry, fine handkerchiefs, particularly delicate perfumes and all that sort of thing. I ventured on china a few times and on books once or twice. I bought the musical instrument for which she had once expressed a desire, and the rug she wanted. I bought flowers and bonbons and the lesser things of that sort, constantly.

In one thing I could not please her, however, and that was in her desire that I should adopt formal habits of dress. Dan Hyatt wore a morning coat, and an afternoon coat, as well as an evening coat. Carmen wanted me to follow suit, but I could not rise to enthusiasm over the idea. I like the evening clothes plan, though it's a bore to get into them often. But to don a long coat and a high hat in the morning with a dinky buttonhole flower, and slender cane, or the afternoon coat still less acceptable to me, with the various changes required, seemed bordering on effeminacy. The unsuitability of such clothes to business was complete in my eyes. Besides I felt like a clown in such get-ups. To hear Carmen talk of them, however, would have made one think it the darling desire of her heart that I should play the popinjay and so I felt the brute when I refused. Moreover, it put a new barrier between

my wife and me, so far as companionship is concerned, because I could not so readily join her and her friends in the late afternoon tea or highball parties, when my coat was tweed and all the others broadcloth.

Foolish, foolish, isn't it? Sickening! It was to me then. I've walked the street back to my office with bubbling curses on my lips, after having tried, a time or two, to sit out an afternoon session with the damned dudes who danced attention on my wife and her friends — in their butterfly clothes. I have waked up in the night and sworn aloud over it, because I was humiliated by the supercilious eyes of fellows — and women — who never earned any dollars to pay for their ease and fun — looking over my unshowy garb with contempt. Curious how a trivial thing like that will make a plain fellow furious. And it's curious again that such a feeling should last and should taint just a bit his feeling toward the wife who got him into it. That's what happened to me also.

Of course, Carmen's ideas of proper expenditures changed with some of the habits she cultivated. There had been a time, for instance, when handsome lynx furs were the delight of her heart. But sables were none too good that winter. Hats that cost fifteen and twenty dollars had seemed luxuriously

extravagant to her when she had first come to the city, but I paid forty for one in April. That isn't much for a hat, of course, if your measure is that of a long purse, but it seemed much to me. Waists began to cost twenty or twenty-five. Silk stockings at three and four dollars a pair became frequent purchases, if not necessities. Shoes were foolish absurdities of the most perishable sort of materials — never of leather — and cost double prices that I had once thought big enough. Gloves, once bought in single pairs, with comfortable content that they were fresh and well-fitting, came in half-dozens of pairs now, with the most discriminating selections of tints.

Luckily for me, money came, too. I was succeeding fast and my income mounted beyond all my expectations. I will not write of that, for it is quite a separate story. But I did not find it possible to put money away, or to invest. We lived at a much higher rate than I had ever expected. The once luxury of the taxicab became more or less a commonplace. Two maids were now necessary to take care of us at home — or rather a cook and a maid. Though we did not care to move from our comfortable apartment, new furnishings appeared to which that new rug was scarcely a beginning. Still our home life did not grow broader.

Carmen found no more pleasure in an evening alone with me, apparently, when her small silk-clad feet rested on the Persian rug, than when the same little feet were lisle-covered and trod a Wilton velvet. It was about that time that I began to reach the sage and entirely original conclusion that possessions do not make happiness, and to try — with marked consistency — to buy new delights for my lovely wife to take away the cloud that was only too frequently in her eyes.

We never attended church. I think religion was a sort of closed book to me. I had never taken much interest in it. Carmen was a member of little St. Luke's church back home, but she made no move to join in the city. I did not care except that I felt that church attendance is one of the forms of home and neighborhood life that helps to make it attractive. But I found little response to early suggestions that we might find a neighborhood church pleasant and build up an acquaintance by regular attendance there that would tend to make more social life for us.

But Carmen did not like the idea. We went once or twice and then dropped it. My reason was because Sunday morning was becoming about my only leisure time with my wife. Hers, I think, was indifference. I had been religiously brought

up, if one can call being taught to pray daily to a dim idea of a distant God and the enforced attendance at Sunday-school religious upbringing. But the Sunday-school habit did not take, with me, and I could not withstand the temptation of those lazy Sunday mornings, with my beautiful little siren of a wife.

The prayer habit held, though, oddly enough. I used to pray — I've always prayed. I am like most men who have prayed as boys. I hold a sort of superstitious unreadiness to stop. I'm a little afraid that something undesirable will happen if I do. That's another of my absurdities. But I used to pray for things I dearly desired, until I found that praying did not get them — and that Carmen took no interest in the petitions. After that I prayed perfunctorily as I was persuaded most people did, and that was the extent of my religion. I was far more vitally interested in the opportunity for close intimacy with my otherwise too much occupied wife, to give many of our moments alone together at night or on those peaceful Sunday mornings, to thoughts of my future life — of hers. So, instead of sermons and meditations, we had kisses and caresses — of which I never tired and which Carmen gave readily enough, when sought. She never stinted

me in such things. She would always respond, always indulge, always permit. And I was demanding enough, for all she had to give. Indeed, I did not understand her in this. It seemed at times as if she felt a strange sense of obligation upon her, to give and give, and I found a guilty feeling resulting from my own selfishness at last.

It was about this time that we first discussed the matter of whether or not we desired children. We had scarcely mentioned this to each other before. Now we talked a little of it. But it took no time for me to discover the fear and aversion in Carmen's heart, underneath a pretense at willingness to meet my desires. So, as I felt no keen wish for babies, I thought little more about it. It might be as it chanced, so far as my feeling was concerned — and I believe this, too, is the average young man's feeling. The chances went against us, in that, as our first year passed away.

We passed a rather hilarious anniversary celebration that second spring, but nothing marks it especially as affecting our permanent happiness. Then we visited Carmen's people and had our little proud strut, in the little old home town. We had a vacation together, with a trip that was fun for me and that she seemed to enjoy. And then we settled

down again at the end of a hot summer, I with the money-making bee and she with eager return to the gayeties.

Carmen suddenly announced to me one day that Dan and Alice Hyatt were to be "visited by the stork," as she put it, and the news brought an odd sort of shock to me. I had never thought of the possibility for them and I cannot explain just what it was I felt. It was of Alice I thought. She was to become the mother of Dan Hyatt's child, and there was something in that notion that took away some cherished feeling that I possessed quite impossible of analysis. I recognized, as anyone would, who knew Alice Hyatt, that motherhood was the natural, the absolutely desirable thing for her; that she was the sort of woman who would make an ideal mother and that there would be something wholly wrong about childlessness for her. Yet I was conscious of distinct distaste and surprisingly strong dissatisfaction at the news.

How Carmen could have known that I felt this is more than I can understand. But she did and spoke of it. Sometimes, I felt that she had a sort of second sight, to divine my feelings, and certainly, the idea that Alice Hyatt's having a baby could be anything to me was one of the last to which I should give expression.

"What's the matter, Harry?" she asked me. "Don't you like it?"

I tried to be honest, despite my surprise. "I can't think of any reason why I should not," I told her, "but I'm free to say, the notion startled me." Carmen smiled — rather sweetly, I thought — and said no more about it. And it was only long afterwards that I realized to what a monstrously absurd thing I had given utterance.

It was almost simultaneous with the news from Dan and Alice, however, that Arnold Granden appeared again on my horizon. I had known that he was about, somewhere in the wake of the crowd in which my wife moved, but I had not seen him. I thought it only characteristic of his attitude — that of the forlorn forgotten lover — that he should not have called upon us, and had wondered little. I had seen and felt no reason for thinking that Carmen cared whether or not he was about. So, I was surprised when, one day, he came into my office, with a show of casualness and professed friendly interest, ending with inquiry as to when a call upon us would be opportune.

He said he had seen Carmen the day before and would be glad to renew the old friendship. He chaffingly alluded to the fact that I was the lucky fellow, in winning the prize he had not been alone

in desiring, and in other ways showed himself much more of a good fellow than I had thought him. So I promptly invited him to come home to dinner with me. He demurred at this but asked the privilege of calling that evening, and said he would telephone to Carmen that he was coming. So, it was arranged, despite insistence from me on the dinner.

He came. Handsome as always, a distinguished looking fellow, a good conversationalist and well informed on society matters, I could see he was a welcome guest to Carmen. I could see no harm in him, either, and felt myself unreasonably suspicious when I found myself looking for signs of undue interest in my wife. So I choked my jealous dislike of him and was comfortable in the sense that I was growing away from such boyish things. And I recognized how Granden's presence livened us up at home and how much Carmen enjoyed hearing and joking about old reminiscences; and I was not displeased with that. So Granden was newly asked to dinner, for a night next week, when Dan and Alice and Mrs. Grail could come to be of the party, and, while I thought the guests oddly chosen, I was glad enough to think that my decency to Granden had healed the damage my jealousy had once done, and that the instant invitation to Alice was a sort of recognition of my generosity.

The night of that dinner is a memorable one, for more reasons than one. To begin with, it was the first time I had ever spent an evening in company where the handsome Mrs. Grail had opportunity to shine. She was handsome. Fine black eyes, beautiful shining black hair that she wore in smooth bands close about a well-shaped head, a remarkable figure, of the full-bosomed but slender type most men admire, a jolly, good-fellow sort of manner that wins upon everybody, accomplishments of no mean order as a pianist and singer of moderately good songs, she was a magnetic center in our little party. I saw more reason why Carmen liked her, and as Mrs. Grail seemed to like me far better than I had ever supposed she did, I naturally saw virtues in her I would not readily have observed had she been indifferent to mine.

Indeed, I was rather of the opinion after that dinner-party that they had all made somewhat more of me than usual, and I was not displeased. And I confess to the flattered feeling upon me at Isabel's deference and partiality. I remember how she spoke to me, in the dining-room, when she and I chanced to be the last to leave after the others, and I paused to pick up my wife's handkerchief that had dropped.

"Aren't you always the kindest, most thought-

ful man!" she exclaimed, softly, and quite seriously, over this trifle. And I supposed she thought so. That was her tone with me.

I have called her Isobel. I did that because Carmen did, and I was joked into the familiarity though I really knew her not at all. The fact that we so used each other's given names put Mrs. Grail therefore on a level of intimacy with the Hyatts, and I felt a vague regret at this when the fact became apparent. But when I saw that Alice seemed charmed by Isobel and that Granden and Hyatt were apparently highly entertained by her, I minded less.

Of course Isobel did not outshine Carmen. I have yet to see the woman who could at any time, and that night, in a new dinner gown of rose color she was the most exquisite thing I have ever seen. Isobel wore black and her shoulders were like perfect marble sculpture. Carmen's were warm human flesh and blood — with the blood ever so little beneath the surface; and the idea seems to express her whole attitude toward her guests, toward me, toward life. The two foiled each other wonderfully, and the effect was to enhance the beauty of each.

Quiet, reserved Alice Hyatt was eclipsed, so far as sparkle was concerned. But one of the memorable things of the time, to me, is the manner in

which she made herself felt and held her own with those two magnificent creatures.

Being in her secret, I watched her, carefully, to give no offense, but curiously, too, to understand her power, if I might. I saw the gentleness of her, the kindliness, the charity, the uncritical attitude, the generous, unassuming readiness to let others shine, as the first foundation of her influence. I recognized her mental qualities, which were superior to most women's. I saw that her sweet face and still shapely figure were not to be despised when beauty was considered. I saw that her quiet, modern gown was in good taste and suited well to her condition. I saw the charm of her ready interest in what interested others and heard her telling, if brief, comments on all subjects raised, with full sense of their shrewd pleasantries. I recognized her social qualifications. And I saw the light of expectant motherhood—what I call a purified light, because no other look in a woman's eyes has ever seemed so pure to me—in her eyes, and my sense of distaste gave way to reverence for her.

Yes, I compared the three. To me, a full-blooded, thoroughly alive man, Isobel Grail was inspiring, Carmen, my own wife, alluring, Alice Hyatt lovable. I could see why a man's love would fasten upon that woman and grow to be a

combination of those two greatest of all attachments, what we call love and genuine friendship. And I looked at Dan Hyatt's round, curly, well-groomed head, with the shrewd but placid grin of the born sport in the presence of pretty women, on his face, and wondered.

As for Granden, he was equally attentive to all the women, it appeared. He showed no very noticeable preference for Carmen, except as special attention to his hostess. He was very friendly with Alice, gallant to Isobel, had enough to say to Dan and me, and was sufficiently interested in general conversation to do his share of the talking. So we were a lively company. We had one of those evenings that one remembers as a "good time," simply, but the sort that is so far superior to all others that I would choose it every time in preference to showy functions or hilarious fun-making or any other form of entertainment. I believe we all had a good time, and however I may analyze it now, cynical as I am, I believed in the wholesomeness of it, too. Perhaps the lingering touch of Isobel Grail's fingers on mine, once noticeably bestowed, and the slow glance of her deep, dark eyes, spiced an hour with excitement for me; perhaps the madonna-like purity in Alice Hyatt's face gave me an uplift that exalted my whole spirit; perhaps the ravishing loveliness of

my wife stirred sense and pride alike, and the presence of my greatest rival made the consciousness of possession doubly sweet; perhaps the chance pampering of my vanity went to my head with the particularly excellent wine Carmen had provided. But I had a good time. Whether Granden found subtle intoxication in Carmen's look and touch; whether Isobel Grail believed I could care to flirt with her; whether Dan thought us all highly amusing, or Alice thought us friendly; whether currents under the surface or only the visible stream of good cheer made it so, a good time it was for all.

CHAPTER VII

BEHIND THE RESERVES

WHAT a group it was in our little living-room that night. Dan in the big chair by the bay-window, with one fat leg crossed over the other, puffed luxuriously at a cigar he rarely removed from his lips. Granden took deep, contented inhalations from his cigarette and posed by the piano, where Carmen stood, slender and lovely, fairly resplendent under the warm lights above her head — and talked to him. Alice sat in the easy rocker near her husband and allowed me to show her Carmen's photographs taken at Lake Constance. Isobel, at the piano, played rollicking melodious things and sang tuneful popular airs in a jolly, idling sort of way. There was much laughing and talking, and nobody heeded the music. We simply chattered. Isobel would break off in the midst of a song and lay her hand on my arm and demand to be allowed to look at a photograph I was showing. Dan called quizzical remarks across to Carmen. Alice

smiled on her husband, and I looked at Dan's wife and wondered at her unspoiled soundness.

We played like children together. There was chaffing and story-telling over the coffee. Afterwards both Isobel and Carmen sang, and Granden who was half an actor entertained us with humorous monologue till we laughed ourselves weary. There were liqueurs, and later, other things to drink, according to the fashion we were following. So we were merry for most of the time.

When that phase passed, we separated into pairs. Dan talked to Isobel, they having found a common interest in baseball or she inventing one for his entertainment. I talked with Alice, of the old days at home and of school recollections, while she dissembled, no doubt, quite as much for my benefit. Granden monopolized Carmen and I overheard badinage between them that roused no jealous disturbance of my pleasure. She showed him various things among our possessions, things we had picked up to help decorate our home. She showed him the photographs Alice and I had looked at. She showed him, finally, the rooms of the house itself, and they fell to conversing over the pictures we had on the walls of my workroom, the china in the dining-room, and all such things, as innocently as might be imagined.

I became absorbed in the talk with Alice and forgot how time passed. She told me little stories about her girlhood and home-life in an unconsciously delightful way. She loved reminiscences of her childhood and I have never heard stories told that had more charm for me. Stories of a little sister she had adored and who had died, she told in a way that took hold of the heart, though there was no effort whatever on her part for effect. Stories of her father and of the good times he used to give her, she related in a way that gave one an intimate vision of a remarkable love between the man and his favorite daughter. Incidents of school-life revealed the conscientious little worker she had been in a way that was at once amusing and pathetic. And reverent mention of her dead mother touched me so deeply that I was close to betraying emotion. Alice had always been a favorite of mine, and now, with new womanliness upon her, in the new revelations that were undoubtedly part of her experience, she appealed to me more than ever.

I found myself telling her little things about my own plans and about business. I discovered that I had related to her things that had pleased or annoyed me, in my city life, that I had not told to Carmen. I caught myself on the edge of discussion with her of some of the more serious problems of

this social life that was burdening me, and I desisted only for fear of the reflection on Carmen. And I remember the decided regret with which I heard Dan announce with surprise that midnight had arrived and that they must break up.

I rose as Alice did and looked for Carmen. She was not in the room at the moment. Isobel was merrily trying to invent reasons for delaying Dan's departure and was not alert to her chum's absence. As there was the light of candles in the dining-room, I suggested that Carmen and Granden might still be there and Alice stepped promptly across the room and to the door. And then, the thing that happened came so quickly that I was quite unwarned.

As Alice reached the door of the dining-room and looked out, I was just behind her. I was close enough to hear a half-smothered exclamation, whether from her or from someone else I do not know to this day. But she turned back instantly after looking out, and spoke aloud to me.

"I guess they're not here, Harry," she said.

But she was not quick enough. Across on the other side of the dining-room, at exactly the right angle from our door to reflect the corner of the room, was a mirror. In it were reflected at the instant the figures of Arnold Granden and Carmen, standing alone together, she looking up mischievously

at him, he with one hand upon her lovely hair. I shall never forget the swift vision, instantly changed at the sound of Alice's voice, but for the moment perfectly clear — her rose-colored gown and wonderfully modeled neck and shoulders against his black coat, his head bent in unmistakable tenderness, her face upturned in unoffended indulgence. And then I saw the sharp start with which they broke apart, and heard Carmen's silver laugh and call to Alice to come out, that she was there.

Alice turned back promptly and with perfect presence of mind. I did not follow her. I stood like a fool, gaping at that mirror for one instant; then I returned to the others by the piano, took a cigar and lighted it, and saw my hand shake while I tried to be steady under Isobel Grail's startled eyes.

If this were a fiction tale I am writing, instead of mere facts out of my life, I would go on to tell how I made a masterly and highly dramatic move to bring proper reproof upon my wife and warning or worse upon Granden. But I did neither. Presently, I was smiling upon them both, as our guests were saying good night. I shook hands with him when he departed. I looked Alice Hyatt in the eyes and laughed at a reference to her reminiscences. I winked at Dan in response to a slight

shrug of his shoulders behind Isobel Grail's white back, and then I brazenly put one hand upon her bare forearm as I clasped her fingers with the other, and gave it just enough pressure to make it definitely intentional. And I saw the laugh come into her black eyes and hated myself and her for it.

When they were gone, Carmen fluttered a little. I sat me down in the big chair and drew long, comfortable puffs on my fresh cigar and felt that the wine was burning in my veins. I was not conscious that I was angry. I felt most amazingly calm, though there was fire all through me. I was in no hurry to speak or act. I was not aware of deep hurt or bitter resentment. I looked at the glowing coal of my cigar as I knocked its first ashes off, and saw instead first the mocking, glowing eyes of Isobel Grail, then the calm, gracious ones of Alice Hyatt and they seemed strangely hopeless in their contrast. And while Carmen talked to her maid about clearing up in the morning and went about putting out her candles, I did not look up or move or speak. I couldn't.

How long I sat there, smoking and regarding visions of eyes, I don't know. I did not seem to be thinking. I was conscious that Carmen went to her room, with some light remark of which I did not catch the meaning. I knew the maid had gone.

My cigar dwindled down to a short length, but was so good I did not wish to throw it away. And then suddenly, I woke to consciousness that my wife was before me, clad only in a filmy, lace-bedecked robe of night, coming to claim the thing I usually sought, the "evening snuggle," as she denominated it. And, in a moment I had opened my arms to her and taken her yielding little form into them, and the ineffable sweetness of her conquered me again, while my heart was weighing lead-like beneath where her soft breast pressed against it. And the thing I felt was pity — pity for her, such as you feel for the naughty but grieved child.

She asked me if I had a good time and I answered I had indeed. Had the others enjoyed it? Yes. Hadn't she been good to let me have a whole evening with Alice Hyatt? I was somewhat staggered at this. But she was not jealous of Alice, she said quite simply. She knew Alice was more intellectual than she and so would interest me. And did I love her, Carmen, less, because she was not intellectual, but only sort of butterfly pretty?

What does a man say to questions like that? What would you have said to the girl who uttered them, lying in absolute abandon in your arms and whispering them to you, with her warm sweet breath on your neck and her fingers clasping your hand

into her bosom, half an hour after she had accepted another man's caress? Perhaps no one else has had a parallel experience. But I—I said nothing—affectionate nothing, in response; forgot my good cigar, yielded to my Delilah, but held the cold ache of heart all the same, just a little too deep, now, for the warmth of her to reach.

I did not mention Granden that night, nor the next day nor the next. Then I found she had been to luncheon with him and Isobel at a down-town restaurant, and I ventured to inquire if he was entertaining as usual. And then things began to seem more as they had been again. I had a sense that there was a little frozen streak in me somewhere, but it did not seem to disturb me, and I bought my wife a birthday diamond, and opened negotiations for an electric run-about for her, on the strength of the successful termination of a certain contract that would net me some thousands.

As I read over what I have written, I see how rapid the movement was along our uncharted course, and swift memories crowd upon each other to be recorded. I see Carmen's pleasure in the birthday diamond, and her rapture over the idea of an electric car of her very own. I remember very well how extravagantly she expressed her delight. I remember, too, that the minor presents that I made

her began to seem commonplaces to her, and to be unnoticed, and the rising feeling in me that she could only be roused to expression of appreciation by the most extravagant gifts.

I was at once hurt and fond over this. There was some bitterness in my resolve to give, to the extent of my ability, and to compel the appreciation I wanted by the very extravagance of my presents. So I followed that course and that was the spirit of my attitude toward my wife at this period in everything. I was determinedly generous; conscious that I was experiencing disappointment in her, I was the more eager to load her with lavish evidences of my love. Perhaps they were not the truest indications of the truest sort of regard. Certainly I had heartburnings while I was giving. But I forgave Carmen for the thing I had seen in the mirror that night, in the spirit in which I gave her her diamond.

There was a time, while I was feeling all this, and doing the things I describe, that Carmen was very fond, very loving, very lavish with favors of the kind she seemed most willing to dispense. But that did not last. I found, presently, a new indifference in her. She was living an easy life, and it seemed to me that I detected a new indolence in her, that extended into all our relations. She grew lovelier and more lovely, if possible, to my eyes

every day, so far as the beauty of her was concerned, but she grew less responsive and less indulgent toward me. It was only toward me, too, for she was apparently quite as full of life and vivacity with others as ever.

I have said that I was unable to interest her in the tastes I had for reading and that we had few resources for self-entertainment at home. Now, this condition became still more marked. The liking she had once shown for visiting and for listening to stories gradually disappeared and the realization was forced upon me that, to be quite plain, I bored her.

But instead of growing more bitter over this, I began now to feel that the fault must lie with me and returned to my notion regarding a man's own responsibility for any failure to hold his wife's affection. But I could not find the trouble, in any analysis I could make then, of our relations. I saw only the unmistakable signs that the girl I adored was less concerned about my regard than she had been and that I was losing the hold I had had upon her.

Carmen showed no sign, meanwhile, that she was conscious of any fault on her own part. I began to believe I saw some portion of responsibility upon her, but I was not clear upon that, even. Presently,

a thing happened, however, that partially opened my eyes. My wife quarreled outright with Alice Hyatt.

I did not witness the event. It happened at my home, but I was not there to see. It was Carmen's story I heard, and her sudden announcement of the fact was characteristic of our new relations.

"Harry," she said one night, as I was trying to tie my evening tie before her mirror, without swearing over the perversity of lawn ties in general and over the fact that we must go out this evening, in particular, "if you want to see Alice Hyatt, you'll have to go to her house hereafter. She won't be coming here."

I turned and looked at my wife, amazed at both implications of the remark.

"What does that mean, Carmen?" I asked.

"It means that I don't propose to put up with the censorship of my doings any longer," said Carmen, coldly.

"What's happened, dear?" I asked.

"She undertook to-day to express the criticism I've often seen in her smug face, and I told her, if she didn't like my ways, she'd best avoid me. And she will."

"Carmen!" I exclaimed. The thought of such a remark from my wife to Alice Hyatt was almost

intolerable to me. It was undeniably something less than becoming to Carmen. It was an affront that I could not conceive as merited in any possible way by a girl like Alice. If it were not an admission on Carmen's part of the fact that there was room for criticism, the quarrel itself was an indication of it. It was an evidence of a lack of consideration by Carmen for Alice's condition and she showed, too, the very sort of resentment without self-vindication that in itself half convicts. I stood and stared at the snapping blue eyes and the set lips of my beautiful girl, and felt a tumult of conflicting things rise in me. Principal among them at the moment was that special exasperation one knows when a peculiarly lovely person does a peculiarly unlovely thing.

She looked at me with defiance in her eyes, for the first time it had really ever appeared there. "Don't you dare to defend Alice Hyatt to me, Harry. I warn you I won't stand for that."

My anger stirred, but I put a strangle hold upon it. "Carmen," I said, "I can't imagine Alice censuring you for anything you could do."

"Of course you can't," she answered, as she went on dressing, with a new show of coolness. "You see only flawless perfection in Mrs. Hyatt. You always held her up to me."

"I've done nothing of the kind," said I.

My pretty wife's pretty lips curled. "Then I've read you wrong, Harry," she said almost gently.

I had hard work to hold my temper. I had been devotion itself to this girl. Why should she accuse me of the special fault of disloyalty?

"You have, indeed," I answered her. "I think a great deal of Alice Hyatt, but I think I have never even drawn a comparison between you and her."

"Go on," said Carmen.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"What do you find, now — now that I've invited the comparison?"

The pain of my inability to handle her began to come back to me and to dampen my indignation. It was growing to be always so; my hurt overcame my wrath wherever she seemed to do me injustice.

"Carmen," said I, "I've told you, always, that, to me, you are incomparably lovely. Alice is a sweet girl and a good friend to us both, but I do not look on her with eyes that draw contrasts to your disparagement."

It was not absolutely true, for I had within the moment seen a vision of Alice Hyatt's kind, generous eyes beside the spite-filled, if star-like, eyes of my wife. But, if I could draw knowledge from

eyes, so could Carmen's shrewd judgment. She saw more in mine than I dreamed was there.

"You leap to the conclusion that Alice — the Alice you know — must have been faultless in such a situation, and you are ready to understand how Carmen — the Carmen you know — could be guilty of bad judgment and too ready temper. Aren't you? Confess, Harry."

"I am sorry you quarreled," I said, slowly, astonished at the accuracy and frankness of her guess, "but I do not undertake to place the blame."

"You placed the blame in your first exclamation."

"I did not; I remonstrated with you for the roughness of your statement, for the instant implication that I would care to continue acquaintance with a woman with whom you had reason to quarrel and for your feeling, evident in your expression, that we are so far apart as not to be disposed to face such things together."

I stopped and then the impulse to candor came to me. "I recognize the fact, Carmen, that we are growing apart. I do not know just why it is, unless it is that I am absorbed in business and so can enter only partially into your social life, or that you are absorbed in the social and care little for the business. Is that it? Can you tell me where my fault is and how to correct it?"

Carmen glanced at me with a curiously disturbed look, but she did not choose to answer. She was just pinning upon her shining hair a hat that was the most bewitchingly pretty thing I had ever seen her wear. The effect of it was disconcerting on me, for I loved her beauty. But her air seemed one of indifference, real or assumed, and it stung me more than anything she had said.

"I'll tell you one thing," I allowed myself to say, with more anger than had been evident in my earlier tone. "You are daily losing regard for me. You are daily losing respect. It is for the very reason that I never do criticise you — for the reason that I do everything I can for you and expect so little in return."

She looked at me with genuine surprise. "So little!" She exclaimed.

"What am I getting out of our married life, Carmen?" I asked.

Her eyes regarded me with a look of sharp resentment first, which gradually grew into puzzlement.

"I don't understand," she said, and the anger seemed to have suddenly departed from her in wonder at a newly discovered thing.

"I see you don't," I answered, with abrupt illumination on my own part. "I think you under-

stand me rather less than any of my friends. Your notion of my attitude toward Alice Hyatt proves that."

She returned to the task of pinning her hat. She was silent a moment. Then abruptly she made a remark of such incisiveness and yet with such charity that both astonished me.

"I think perhaps you don't understand your own attitude toward Mrs. Hyatt, Harry."

What I might have replied to that I do not know. One of the maids came to tell us that our car was at the door, and the necessity of struggling into coats forbade my further talk of such unimportant matters as the altered relations we bore to each other. And the evening's dinner put the curtain back over the reserves of each of us, because it gave impulse a chance to cool. I felt next day that I had said enough, though I would inevitably have said more that night but for interruption; while Carmen doubtless felt that she understood me quite thoroughly now that I had aired my grievance and failed to take issue with her suggestion as to the extent of Alice Hyatt's influence over me.

But that talk brought us no closer together, for I saw Carmen in a brilliant café next afternoon with Isobel Grail and Granden, and with Dan Hyatt as the fourth of the party. It was purely accident that

I chanced to go to the place with a customer for luncheon. It was not one of Carmen's usual haunts and I had no idea of seeing her there. When I did, I felt a sudden desire to conceal the fact that I had discovered her, while surprise at Hyatt's presence with them had its own effect.

It was some little devil of bad luck that guided me that day and it was some of his ilk, no doubt, that suggested to me that night to ask Carmen if she had seen Alice again — or Dan. She answered in the negative and I perversely followed up the line.

"Does Dan know you quarreled with Alice?" I asked.

"How should I know?" she asked. "I am not in Dan's confidence."

"I saw him to-day," I said, half minded to add, "with you."

"Did you?" she replied indifferently.

"Not to speak to him," I substituted for the phrase I had contemplated. "Do you bar him from my acquaintance also?" I asked, with a pretense at humorous allusion to her prohibition against Alice — as if I did not take it seriously.

Carmen did not smile. "I prefer it," she said promptly.

I felt the desire to force the thing now, and discover if she would deliberately falsify. I could un-

derstand how she might have motive, for I had assigned the obvious reason for Hyatt's presence in the café with them. I recalled his long evening with Mrs. Grail at our house.

"You've shut Dan out of your acquaintance, seriously, Carmen?" I asked, meanly leading her on.

"Naturally," she said. "Having no use for his wife, I have none for him."

"Hm!" said I. She had still not said that she had not seen him. I wanted to corner her. "When did you see him last?" I asked outright, but covering my interest with attention to my cigar — that friend of man in all delicate situations where deliberation and concealment are requisites.

"Why, I don't know," said my wife, glibly. "I'm not sure I've seen him since he was here."

She did not look up at me immediately but after a patient watch for it, I saw her interrogating glance at me.

My heart began to burn with a feeling I had never had before toward her. I wanted to tell her then that I knew she was telling me an untruth. But I believed she was shielding the intimacy of Hyatt and Isobel Grail and that suggested so many new thoughts and possibilities that I was quickly on guard to preserve the secret of my knowledge. That I

was angry, I can hardly say. I was shamed and humiliated, hurt beyond words — I feared beyond healing — and the blow upon my already wavering faith in Carmen's regard was cruel.

I covered the feeling, however — in tobacco smoke — and waited till I was alone, to begin thinking it out.

It was just two days after that Carmen asked an amazing question of me at dinner — which we chanced to be taking at home. "Did you enjoy your call on Mrs. Hyatt, Harry?" she inquired demurely.

I had not been to see Alice, nor thought of it, and I said so. She smiled sweetly in my face. "Don't take the trouble to lie about it, dear. I saw you."

CHAPTER VIII

TESTING THE TETHER'S LENGTH

IT was not the accusation that concerned me. Neither was it the perfectly obvious fact that, by some means, she had been misinformed regarding my movements. It was not the falsehood she told when she said she saw me go to Alice Hyatt's house. Having heard her speak a deliberate untruth once, I was not surprised that she should try to convict me of what she believed to be the truth, by so direct a charge. But the fact that she suspected me of that disloyalty and had apparently taken pains to get information, at all, about my movements, was one of the most sinister indications of our situation. Suspicion, spontaneous and gratuitous, means just one thing for the mind in which it originates. It means conscious guilt. And knowing that my wife was already deceiving me, to the extent of keeping a friend's discreditable secret from me, I could understand her readiness to doubt me.

But I answered her plainly. "I have not been

to see Alice Hyatt, Carmen," I said, "and therefore you did not see me. You have either made a mistake or you have been misinformed and have tried to bluff an admission out of me upon a thing that has not even been in my mind."

She was visibly shaken, but, having committed herself, she did not know how to retreat. Therefore, she bluffed again.

"My eyes are pretty good, still, Harry."

"They are not good if they see things that do not happen, Carmen. Moreover, I am not a liar, as you know perfectly well."

"I see more things that do happen than you credit me with seeing," she said slowly.

"Evidently," I answered.

"And I am not a liar, either," she added, with sudden scenting of a possible undermeaning in my words.

I did not answer that statement. I smoked and looked at the end of my cigar.

"I remarked that I am not a liar, Harry," she repeated.

I looked at her. "I have not accused you, Carmen — as you have accused me."

That shook her again. I saw it and pitied her instantly. Relenting, toward her, seems to have been my strong point. I am certain that she saw

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the change in my feeling for she took quick cue from it.

"You're not loving me much these days, are you, Harry?" she said.

"I haven't changed, so far as I can realize, Carmen. But I am convinced that you do not love me."

She looked away from me. We were sitting together in our living-room, expecting callers who had promised to come. A number of people came to us, though Carmen's expectation that she had once announced, as to making our home a center of social life, had never materialized to any great extent because of the café life.

"You are convincing yourself, Harry," said she, answering my half-pleading remark. "You surely have had evidences of my regard for you. Am I not your wife?"

"You are my wife, Carmen," answered I, heavily, and stopped.

I expected she would go on, but she did not. I would not open the original subject again, so our conversation ended there. Our callers came and our surface life renewed itself like the film of ice that freezes across the disturbed spot in the pool when quiet is restored. But I raged and grieved inwardly by turns, then and afterwards, at what was

coming to us. And then I made up my mind that I would not have it so, and redoubled my efforts to win back my girl. So it was the story of forgiveness and presents and affection over again.

Weeks and months were passing meanwhile. Prosperity — mere financial success — pursued me. By a freak of fortune I happened to invent an insignificant device for household use that was manufactured and immediately made a foolishly enormous hit. Money began to come in faster from this source than from my regular business, and my income grew larger than I had ever dreamed of seeing it. I began to think I might be a rich man some day and there would have been satisfaction in that, if only the real treasure of my heart had not appeared to be in jeopardy. I went to my work with rather a heavy heart, however, for what I did for Carmen bore only the same old fruit — a new indifference.

Fate played me a curious trick in the early spring. One morning as I was starting for my train I was passing the building in which Dan and Alice lived, which was in my daily way, when I was suddenly summoned by Dan himself, from his own doorway. Quite without preliminary came the announcement that the prospective mother had been taken suddenly ill, and the request that I hasten to summon a doc-

tor. Hyatt had been calling two on the 'phone but neither was available, and he dared not leave his wife. Of course, I acted quickly.

When I came back to the house with a physician, my instant impulse was to go in and call Carmen on the wire and tell her of Alice's situation, for there seemed to be trouble in store. So that was what I did, feeling that it was a case where a woman friend was needed, and seeing that Carmen was the only one available.

So I called up my wife, told her that I was at Hyatt's and explained how a serious danger was threatening Alice. Carmen came. She was not capable of refusing, even if she desired to do so. And when she arrived, I left as soon as I decently could.

The danger to Alice was averted, fortunately, and I supposed the incident closed. But, within a day or two I discovered my mistake. Carmen made a sudden new attack upon me one Sunday—one of those Sunday mornings which had been once so peaceful and happy.

"It was fortunate that you were at the Hyatts' the other morning when they needed you," was her method of opening.

"I was called in by Dan as I was passing exactly as I pass every morning," I replied. "Why do

you take it for granted that I would call there against your wish?"

"As I say," went on Carmen, "it was fortuitous."

"That was not what you said, but I accept the amendment."

She looked at me shrewdly, and then dropped that portion of the subject and I did not have the heart to try to disabuse her mind of the impression she seemed to be cherishing.

"I'll never consent to have a child," she announced, suddenly, as if to give the subject a deliberate twist.

I looked my surprise.

"It's a terrible experience for a woman," she went on. "I'll never, never go through it."

"People find happiness in children sometimes, Carmen, when they haven't hit it off very well before the babies come."

"Never!" she insisted, shaking her pretty head. "It isn't right for men to force children upon women."

That struck me as a novel idea. "I'd never thought of it in that light," I answered.

"Not thought of it in that light?" she echoed. "What do men marry women for?"

I could hardly credit her with the question at

first. Then I answered deliberately. "I don't know what men marry women for, Carmen. I married you because I loved you."

"What did you love about me, Harry?" The question was not so gentle as it reads. It sounded hard.

"Everything," I told her, with some of my unhappiness welling up in emotion.

"You are just like all the rest," she said. "I understand you perfectly. You marry to — to possess. Isn't it so? Then you demand everything a woman can give and expect to give her — just a living, perhaps with trimmings, as you will say, besides. And you expect her to have children."

"I've never insisted on that point, Carmen. But I didn't know you had such an aversion to it."

"Men think of women as creatures meant to minister to them," she said, in a phrase that sounded like a quotation.

"What do you women want?" I asked. "I've always supposed it was they who desired the children."

"Horrors, no!" she answered. "Do you think any woman deliberately chooses to suffer?"

"I can't understand their courage, I am willing to admit."

"It isn't courage — it's — submission," said my

wife. "We submit. That's what is imposed upon us. That's what you think we are for."

"I doubt very much if one man in ten thousand has the thought of children in his mind when he marries the girl of his choice, Carmen," said I.

"Is that any credit to you, then?" she flashed, as if she had set a trap for me.

I began to get her thought. "You don't allow us very high standards," I answered.

"I've been married nearly two years to you, Harry, and what do you suppose I have found you care most for?"

"For you, I hope, Carmen."

"Yes, for me. But in what way? You want me for a plaything — to fondle and caress. What else do you show you care for? You've made no effort to enter into my life."

The argument did not ring sincere. Besides she knew that the reasons why I did not enter into portions of her life, were because I was shut out by necessity. It sounded like self-justification. I went back to her earlier statement.

"You are quite wrong about the ideals men hold, my dear girl," I said to her. "I admit the charge in part. We are as God made us, but we love better than just that."

She smiled her sweet, ironical smile.

"Just as God made you?" she repeated. "Why lay the blame on God?"

"But men have a higher love for women than you credit them with."

"Oh, you have a patient kind of willingness to pamper us, yes," she said. "You are very generous with your money and your gifts."

"That has a vicious sound, Carmen."

"I'm not sure that it hasn't a vicious meaning," she replied.

"Then I pity you for thinking that. Do you believe this is a bargain into which we have entered, you and I? And have you stated your honest conception of the terms?"

She looked at me for a long minute before she replied. Then slowly, "Well, every man who approaches a pretty woman has just one look in his eyes."

It was a world-old charge, but think of having it made as a new-discovered truth by a young wife of less than two years!

"Did you marry me with a preconception of this, Carmen?" I asked.

"Of course," she said. "Every girl knows."

"Does she? That seems inconceivable to me,

because I am certain that every boy does not. I never had such notion of bargaining in my head, and I have never heard it talked of."

"Of course, I do not mean that I knew it all. I felt it and I was told a little," said Carmen, slowly.

"I see," I replied. "Then we began in a misconception, didn't we?"

"I have yet to discover it," she said. "As I have told you once or twice, Harry, you don't know yourself."

"Perhaps not," I admitted, "but I know I am not so poor a creature as you seem to think. Carmen, what did you marry me for?"

She did not answer. She asked me the counter question again. "What did you marry *me* for?"

"For yourself — because I loved you — because I wanted your companionship, your partnership. Because I wanted to give you everything I possessed and can gain. Because I felt I could not do without you."

I was deeply in earnest, but Carmen looked at me with narrowing eyes.

"That's what you wanted to give, Harry — not what you wanted to take."

It half silenced me and she saw that it did. She was curled up in the big chair by the living-room windows, like a kitten basking there in the sun, but

she shook out her negligee and got up on her feet, with a sudden fire that rarely appeared in her.

"Harry," she burst out, "can you walk in the street or sit in a café, or attend the theater or watch the home life that comes under your observation, without understanding men's attitude towards women? Do you mean to deny the most evident fact in life? Do you think a girl is blind that she does not see it and understand? Don't you suppose we grasp the truth in history and literature and in our daily lives?"

She stood before me, a picture of sincere anger now. I had never seen her so before and the mood as well as the words brought me revelations.

"Why do men choose pretty women rather than sensible ones, if it's companionship and partnership and intellectual congeniality they want? Do you mean to tell me that Dan Hyatt married Alice Van Tuyl for intellectual companionship? Did you marry me for that? I know better, of course. Why do men grow tired of women after brief periods of wedded bliss and turn to other women? Why do men admire only young women and scorn old ones? What is there at the bottom of this social problem we hear so much about? What is the secret of the red light district of which people whisper in horror? What is it that makes the divorce

court thrive? What's at the bottom of every scandal?"

She stopped for breath and I was nearly as breathless as she. Then suddenly, she came up before me, put her hands on my shoulders and looked down into my eyes, half fierce, half appealing.

"Tell the truth, Harry," she demanded, "isn't it the attitude of men toward women?"

It was as if she had struck me a blow in the face. I was so taken by surprise, so astounded at the idea of little Carmen Brainard thinking such thoughts, so stung and cut at the charges that seemed aimed at me, and so moved by the sheer pity of it, that I could not answer her. I reached up my arms to pull her down into them, with the instinct to take away the pain of it by power of affection, but she shrank back.

"No," she said, "not that!"

I rose to my feet. "Carmen," I said, "you are only half right. Men must stand convicted on some of the counts. But it isn't as you paint it with your questions, which anticipate but one answer. And if girls hold that idea, there's where the trouble lies — in that misconception."

"And who is responsible for that idea?" she asked, turning suddenly away and going to the window, as if to hide emotion.

"I can't tell you that in an instant, but it is not the loyal husband who loves his wife honestly. We are not all sensual beasts. If we were we'd meet and mate and part and mate again elsewhere. We have the element in our natures that compels us — the instinct — but it isn't paramount."

"It seems to be. Everything points to it."

"Not everything, Carmen. Our civilization has forced some abnormalities on us, but there are better things in men than you say. You have told only half the story."

"I've seen only half of it then," answered Carmen.

"Besides, you make out that women have no power or part. Do you place no responsibility on them?"

"I know that men do — from Adam down. But it's not as I see it."

"Don't you know that women can control? Don't you know that the whole plan of it gives women power — untold power — and, therefore, some part of the responsibility?"

"Women know they have power, of course," she said. "There are daily spectacles that prove it."

"Just so. And don't some of them abuse it, and trade upon it? Haven't we already touched upon the bargaining? Isn't the woman a party to it?"

Is it natural for men to buy what is for sale when they haven't chanced to find a better thing? Is it men's fault only that marriages are being made with such low standards?"

I went to her and took her in my arms. She did not resist now, but stood passive. "Carmen, where did you get such ideas? Not from your mother."

"Partly," she said. "I've seen it in other women's lives though, too."

"Before you were married?"

"Of course?"

"And since?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Isobel. Her husband left her for another woman."

I winced. I remembered certain things in Isobel's eyes on one occasion.

"Is she a convincing example?" I asked.

"Yes — to me. Poor girl! But there's Alice, too."

"What do you mean? Alice is one of the happiest women I know."

"Is she?"

"She certainly appears to be."

I knew what my wife meant, but I could not let her know, now, that I understood without reveal-

ing my knowledge of her falsehood to me. I began to care less about that falsehood, however. I was getting closer to my wife than I had ever gotten before, it seemed. I was hoping — happily hoping.

"Yes," said Carmen slowly, "she appears to be. But she's going to have a child, and she is going down to death's door — because her husband has willed it. And what does he care?"

"I don't know what he cares," said I. "Do you?"

"No; but I believe he cares less than nothing."

"Why?"

"He follows other women."

I had not expected this frank statement. "How do you know, Carmen?" I asked.

"I know," she answered simply.

I was on the point of asking if he followed Isabel Grail, but I stopped. Her answer would either betray the fact that she had shielded if not connived at the meetings of Dan and Isabel, or it would put another untruth between us. I did not speak, and one of those strange psychological alterations of attitude took place between Carmen and me, which come only when the truth is left unspoken in vital discussion. I missed an opportunity. What would have resulted from bringing out the truth then and

there, I cannot guess, but it would have been better than what did come.

"Of course," said Carmen, "I do not blame him."

"Don't blame Dan Hyatt for leaving a wife like Alice to run after — another woman?"

"I said 'other women,'" corrected Carmen. Her intention to shield Isobel was clear.

"And you don't consider that reprehensible?"

"I didn't say that, either, Harry. I said I didn't blame Dan. He married wrong — just as so many others do. He and Alice are both in an unhappy position."

"Assuredly, if what you say is true. But, Carmen, it won't help it for Dan to go after other women."

"It is a man's way."

"It is some men's way. But Alice Hyatt is too good a woman to be served so. Can't you —?"

I stopped short again. I had nearly betrayed my own knowledge of her connection with Dan's defection.

"Can't I what?" asked Carmen, turning suddenly to look in my face.

"Can't you do something for Alice?" I ended lamely.

My wife laughed, a sudden, hard little laugh, and moved away from me.

"For Alice!" she repeated. "I'd like to do something for all the mismated ones — *all* of them, Harry."

"What does that mean, Carmen?"

"Oh — nearly everybody I know," she answered, and went away to her bedroom. And my roused hopes began to sink.

I felt like going after her to take up the thread we had dropped, but I hesitated. I should think it out first. I was not wise enough to know how to talk to her about this. I did not know how to meet her prejudices, and I feared I should only confirm them if I forced more discussion now. But I felt vaguely that I had said either too much or not enough. One thought that came out of it all, however, stayed with me to my good. One question I asked myself. Was not the whole thing a matter of individual honesty and self-control; and if so, how far was I, Carmen's husband, responsible for Carmen's standards? Was I a sensualist? Had I burned such an impression of men on my sweet wife's heart that she judged us all to be mere hunters of women? Why had she found, in two years of married life, no reason to change her low opinion of

my whole sex? What sort of thing had I been guilty of that she should have read me so?

I was shamed, and in all humility I tried to see things as they were. What had I demanded of my wife? With her avowed preconceptions of men, what confirmation had she found? Why had I created such an impression when it had been companionship, friendship I had wanted from Carmen? Had it been partly because, with her ideas already biased, she did not offer more, or had it been because passion had overborne and brutalized the instincts I had supposed were uppermost? What manner of man was I? What manner of husband had I been?

If I had been tender to Carmen before, I was doubly so now. One thing was abruptly clear to me and that was that I must change the impression she held of me. I leaped at the idea with hope renewed for I felt that I could do that. I would do it at any cost — and it would win her back! With what an agony of self-blame did I come to that conclusion! I had hurt her, outraged her, shamed her — my darling; and so had forced upon her beliefs that degraded us both. Heaven forgive me; I would change that.

But life is too complex for simple propositions

like that to straighten out great tangles. If ever a man meant well, I did. But I knew so little!

One day a week later, I found my letters at home all opened. It was an extraordinary thing for Carmen had never touched my mail before. And though I really cared little, it seemed so sudden and ruthless that it annoyed me.

I asked her about it, as pleasantly as I could. "Well, how'd you happen to do that, dear?" I said. "New idea, isn't it?"

"Yes," she answered. "I thought maybe you'd like to share your secrets with me."

This was enigmatic. "I have no secrets that you cannot share with me, my dear, but why did it occur to you just now; and why take this sudden and — energetic method? It looks as if you expected to trap me."

"You don't like it, do you, Harry?" was her answer.

"Not very well," I admitted.

She laughed and said nothing more. I did not pursue the subject, but the incident did not add to my comfort. The letters were not opened next day nor the next and I began to feel that it would make things pleasanter if I were to give her full and free permission to open all my mail. I did not, at once,

however, because of the slight resentful feeling that clung to my mind. And then within the week — I think it was a Saturday — I found a letter that had been secretly tampered with, and a wretched suspicion against my wife was inevitable. I found an envelope that had been opened by bungling method and resealed, by somebody, and, as it contained only a bill, it seemed inexplicable to me. I said nothing about it and studied over the matter till I was miserable in the certainty that Carmen was dealing with me in strange underhanded ways.

But I could not endure to mention the matter and I made up my mind that the best method of winning and holding her confidence was to give her the free privilege I had contemplated. So I followed that plan.

“Carmen, I was unnecessarily nasty about that matter of the letter-opening the other day,” I told her. “I’ll really be glad if you will open the mail — all of it — here at home. Then you can let me know at the office if anything needs immediate attention.”

She looked at me with an amused expression, at first, but she suppressed a smile and answered quite simply:

“All right, Harry.”

And I was much relieved, because I began to see

that she had no appreciation of what the small matter meant to me. But she opened the letters, after that — all of them, without fail, if she was at home when they arrived. And she did not even notice that I carefully avoided opening mail addressed to her.

But I was determined that I would be to her all that a devoted husband should be, in spite of these minor troubles, and so I tried to be broad enough to forget every trifle and to think only of doing my own share and more than my share toward making our relation ideal. I tried to be more generous in the matter of time given to social affairs — such as our social affairs were. I did not care much for the people who had gathered about us, and many of the older friends whom I had specially liked seemed to be drifting away from us. I quickly found that it was quite impossible for me to mingle with Carmen's friends in Carmen's pursuits, for more reasons than one. I could not enjoy the game they played, I could not spare the time it demanded and I could not like the people themselves. Though my new prosperity made a welcome for me of the sort that is extended for the prosperity's sake, I hated the whole programme as cordially as I had before and felt myself hopelessly out of it.

It was when this experiment had proved a dismal

failure that I noticed what seemed to be a fresh burst of eagerness on Carmen's part over all her gaieties, more and more frequent signs of a separateness of interests and with these, more petulance and disposition to criticise me at home. She took to fault-finding, a thing in which she had not indulged much heretofore. It began to appear to me that few things I did looked right to her. She charged me, among other things, with less thoughtfulness for her, when it seemed to me that my mind was occupied with her and with what I might do for her, most of the time. She seemed less and less appreciative, more and more impatient, more careless of my approval or disapproval, more ruthless of my feelings, more indifferent to my comfort, my peace or my companionship. Indeed, I began to feel that I was counting for very little in my wife's life.

And then one day I met Dan Hyatt on the street and he dared to make a joke about it. "Carmen's setting us all a swift pace, Hal," he remarked, as if it amused him highly; and then, when I was quite unresponsive, he looked at me with his coarse laugh and added: "Is she trying to test the length of her tether?"

CHAPTER IX

THE POISON OF DISTRUST

WE attended a bridge party at the home of an acquaintance named Furniss, not long after this. It was a large affair and there were a lot of prizes and all the usual doings that make such entertainments popular with women. I met Granden there. I had seen him several times, in various companies, and he had always shown the same lazily friendly attitude toward me. I despised him cordially, but it was one of my earnest efforts not to spy upon him and Carmen and to trust my wife completely. I willed not to know any new reason for distrust and, so far, none had been forced upon me.

Ethel Furniss, daughter of the house, was one of Carmen's new friends. She was a rather pretty girl, fair, though not so golden as Carmen herself, of the type of style that I would have readily described as "fly," if she had not been of Carmen's immediate acquaintance. She was a real flirt — there was no doubt about that. She was full of

biting remarks that sometimes cut, free with allusions to delicate matters, wholly indifferent to the liking and the opinion of people who did not appeal to her as desirable acquaintances. She was ready and rather eager to shock the fastidious, to defy conventions. She wore daring clothes. She showed familiarity with topics usually supposed to be taboo among young women and dared to touch upon them with men.

Beside Carmen, she was a coarse, vulgar little fool, but my wife seemed to fancy her. How I looked upon her after my first conversation with her may be surmised from what we said. I had met her before that night, but I had never talked with her, and this is how she began to cultivate me.

"Oh, I want to talk with you. I want to know what Carmen's husband is like. Do you know, you are the most interesting man in this whole circle?"

"You flatter me," said I. "Why so?"

"Because you are an ideal husband."

"Indeed? Whose ideal?"

"Mine, for one."

"That's quite overwhelming, Miss Furniss, but tell me what your ideal is. Perhaps I shall not measure up. Carmen's notion might be quite different."

"Nonsense; Carmen knows a good thing."

"And I'm the good thing?"

"In that sense, yes," she laughed. "I think you must be a wonder. Any man who gives his wife everything and expects nothing in return is my ideal."

I smiled, not altogether with pleasure. "You want a man who will idolize."

"I want a man who will spoil me utterly, as you spoil Carmen."

"Do I?"

"Of course, everybody knows it but you. You're a perfect innocent, if you don't recognize it, too."

"Well, I'm rather fond of Carmen. What looks like spoiling may be just my way of expressing affection."

"Then you're a dear. I could love you to death."

I was not much accustomed to this tone of conversation, I confess, and felt that the pace was new. I rose rather clumsily to the occasion. "Then I could not die a hero," I answered.

She looked at me for an instant, not quite certain what that meant, so I felt that I had countered successfully. To get such an extraordinarily speedy young person to guessing at meanings would be an achievement. I trained my guns.

"You are a worshiper of women?" she asked with a languishing look from her bright blue eyes.

"Of woman," I amended.

She smiled teasingly. "How cautious you are. It would be fun to flirt with you."

"Is that what you are doing?"

"Never; oh, never," she protested extravagantly. "But I'd rather have you to love me. When are you going to be divorced?"

I was in a mood to be entertained rather than angered by her brazenness. What was the use of offense? "Is that an invitation or a threat?" I asked.

"Both," she responded promptly.

"What am I offered?" I asked.

"Me," she exclaimed, with mock pique.

"And the price?"

"Oh — just what you give Carmen."

"Minus the alimony?"

"Alimony!"

She stopped and looked at me, on the edge of some remark, and then thought better of it. I can hardly say I think she did not dare to make it. I tried to change the tone of the talk. I felt a slight sense of nausea.

"Are you an enthusiastic bridge player?" I asked.

"Is that a requisite qualification?" she responded.

"I'm not a crank myself."

"I'm a wretched player," she said, "but I can try. I'd do anything for the right husband."

"Even to cultivating more bridge?" said I.

"Anything," she insisted "—barring babies."

She looked across the room to where Dan Hyatt stood. Whether it was because she had not quite the effrontery to face me with this or because she was thinking of the Hyatts and their expectations, I am quite unable to say. But I thought of Alice Hyatt, brave sweet woman that she was, and my gorge rose at this gaudy imitation. I had a sudden impression of the falseness of such an unsexed thing as she who talked to me that made me think of the parasitic growth on the wholesome plant. Is this type of woman a fungus on society? I believe she is. We have yet to isolate the germ that produces her, but she's not the woman God gave man in His pity for our loneliness.

What I showed of this feeling in my face, I do not know, but the unabashed one came back to examine my expression presently and put her finger on my thought. "You're an idealist," she said, "and we are so few of us ideal. You should be careful not to deceive yourself."

"Just what does that mean?"

"It's a compliment."

"Not a very obvious one. It sounded like a warning."

She paused. "I guess you're able to take care of yourself — and of your wife," she vouchsafed presently.

"I hope so. But how are we threatened?"

My tone was humorous, but I was willing to have a serious reply if one was offered. What I got was a long look from her hard eyes, after which she elevated her brows extraordinarily and turned deliberately to look at Granden who stood near by talking to Carmen as usual.

"Isn't Arnold Granden a handsome fellow?" asked Miss Furniss.

If she did not intend the connection between her remarks, she was very clumsy. Besides, she was far too adept in all such matters to miss a perfectly obvious situation.

"Your acquaintance with Carmen is not of very long standing, is it, Miss Furniss?" I queried, harmlessly.

"I think I know her pretty well," answered the girl, turning to me somewhat mystified.

"Then you won't need a verbal answer to your suggestion."

"What do you mean — my suggestion?" she

asked, but her eyes were laughing with mischief, and I saw that I need not reply to that.

"Yes," said I, "Granden is exceedingly handsome," and I turned to greet Dan Hyatt, who had crossed to us.

Our evening of bridge brought me once or twice into contact with Miss Furniss, but she turned her ruthless tongue in other directions than mine. I could have felt quite well quit of her, had I not the unpleasant fact to contemplate that she was growing to be quite an intimate of Carmen's. In fact, none of my wife's friends appealed to me much. I had far more interest in and respect for Isobel Grail, however, than for the Furniss girl, though I was not at all sure that I knew the older woman thoroughly.

I was not conscious that things of consequence were happening about me that evening. I suppose I was more or less stupid, as Carmen sometimes informed me. But two things occurred before I slept that helped to postpone the hour when my eyes closed.

After the bridge was ended, it was some pleasure to me that Carmen should be awarded the prize, though I was surprised at the value of the trinket bestowed. I believe it was some bit of jewelry, but have forgotten, except that its worth astonished me.

While the prizes were being shown about, I stood in a small alcove-like space between the room in which I had been last playing and a hall leading to the back of the house, and took the opportunity to examine some handsome books on a stand there which I had noticed earlier. I had no thought of concealment and eavesdropping was the last thing that could have entered my mind, but I found myself an involuntary listener to a conversation that took place almost at my side, with only a Japanese screen to hide the participants. It was Alice Hyatt's name that caught my ear, and I knew the tones of the speaker's voice too well to mistake them. It was young Ethel Furniss who was talking.

"Oh, don't you know," she asked some woman who had evidently inquired, "Alice Hyatt is a victim of the stork."

"A victim," somebody laughed.

Then, abruptly I heard Carmen's voice. "That's the right expression."

"What a fool a woman is to stand for it," said the elegant Miss Furniss.

"How can she help it?" asked someone, whose voice was not familiar.

"Help it," echoed Carmen. "There are plenty of hows. It's a woman's own fault if she gets into that predicament."

I laid my book down. I had already heard too much to be willing they should know I had listened. I started to walk away but found that someone was standing at the edge of the screen, and that I could not avoid being seen, if I stepped out. I turned back therefore and picked up my volume that I might at least appear to be absorbed in it. The next moment I was listening to the recital of a story of such sort that my very face burned with shame for the teller. It was of a kind that I had heard from the coarsest of men only. It was told with a boldness and an attention to detail that was almost unbelievable, and when it was ended, the sudden laugh at its impure suggestion struck me on the raw in such a way that I cursed half aloud in my wincing.

I did not know the voice that told the story. It was none of the three women whose tones I could most readily recognize. But the laugh was general and generous and there was no remonstrance over the tone of the tale. I felt no further desire to conceal my presence behind the screen. I laid down my book once more, and I walked out, without looking at the group of women, indeed, but without regard to their inevitable conclusions. And I noted the sudden pause in their talk and then a titter that told its own story, and I went out into the second

card room, with more curses welling up to my lips, in sheer disgust and disillusionment.

Carmen and I walked home together after that party, and I was silent as I am apt to be when I am stirred. But if she had an inkling as to my feelings, she gave me no clue to her knowledge. She had a grievance of her own, it appeared, and it came out when I mentioned the prize she had won.

"It was a very handsome thing," I commented, recalling my surprise at its value.

"Yes, it's nice enough," said my wife. "But it's no credit to you that I won it."

"I know it," said I. "I'm sorry we lost when we were partners."

"Sorry," she exclaimed crossly. "You lost two games for me."

"I don't quite see that," said I, for I could remember no glaring misplays.

"Stupid," said Carmen. "Why didn't you make it no trump when I pressed your foot after Ethel Furniss's remark. That was plain enough, wasn't it?"

"It was plain enough, Carmen, but I don't like that sort of thing," said I.

It sounds smug, doesn't it? But smug or not, I don't enjoy cheating.

"Oh, you!" exclaimed my wife. "You make me sick."

"I'm sorry. Still you won your prize."

"I did. But I wouldn't if Arnold had been as squeamish as you are. You're one great prig, Harry. I'm furious with you."

"Even so," I responded.

I began to feel the stir of something hotter than resentment, deeper in my heart than my usual distress at trifles. We reached our house and entered, and Carmen went swiftly into her room, as if to avoid the kiss I usually claimed when we came home alone after an evening out. I felt that I could not have kissed her at the moment, however. When my wife came out again, she leaped suddenly to an unexpected attack upon me that drove away the regret that might have followed that feeling.

"What right have you to stand off and criticise me in such a way, Harry?" she asked.

"What rights have I of any kind in these days, Carmen?" I answered, stung to sharp retort.

"You set yourself up as a moral censor, you criticise everything I do, you disapprove of everybody I know."

"I've done nothing of the kind in any instance,

Carmen," I replied. "If you see disapproval of your friends and of your doings in my manner, I am free to say, however, that you see correctly. I'll tell you frankly now, if you like, that I think the influence of the women you have chosen as friends is hurting you."

"I'm deteriorating, am I?" She laughed. "You pious thing! What a fraud you are! I don't make pretenses, Harry; that's the only difference between you and me."

"Is it?" I responded, indifferent to self-defense now. "When a woman grows careless of appearances, she is in danger."

"Oh, you old stick! Don't talk danger to me. Don't you think I can take care of myself?"

"I don't know what you call taking care of yourself, my dear."

"You think I am playing with fire?"

"No, I think you are splashing in muck."

Her beautiful eyes opened quickly. I had startled her there.

"It isn't so pretty a phrase, is it?" said I. "When women get to cheating at cards and—"

"Cheating at cards!" She flamed with apparent anger.

"That's what I call it," I persisted, too much roused to soften towards her at the moment.

"When women cheat at cards and tell dirty stories, they are not making anything half so attractive as fireworks."

Carmen's fair skin grew crimson. Whether she had been among those who had known that I heard the story by the screen, I could not judge, but she understood the allusion instantly. "I was not to blame for that, Harry," she said, with more humility than I could have expected.

"I didn't hear you discountenance it."

"Of course, not. I wouldn't set myself up as censor." Her change of tone was instant.

"Are you lowering your standards, Carmen?" I asked more quietly.

"I am growing wiser," she said.

"In the slang sense, I'm afraid," I suggested.

"Don't slur, Harry. You've said quite enough without that."

"Do you realize, Carmen, that you and I are getting farther and farther apart every day?"

"Yes," she answered frankly.

"Do you understand that we have about wrecked our wedded happiness?"

"I see that there isn't much in it. I'm not prepared to say that I see much more in anyone else's married life, so far as that's concerned. We've discussed this, why rake it up?"

"Don't you want to make a try to hold on to happiness?"

"I don't propose to make false grabs after moonshine," said my wife.

"Then you think the old ideals of wedded content are moonshine?"

"I think most of the things that are preached at us are nothing more."

"That is rather a wide statement."

"Surely it is. I've had a wide experience now."

"Are you sorry you married me, Carmen?"

"Not altogether. I've got some of the things I wanted."

"What, for instance?"

"Oh, freedom."

"Freedom from what?"

"Parental restraint." She laughed slightly.

"What else?"

"Conventions."

"Have you escaped them?"

"Some of them. People don't criticise a married woman as they do a single one, for some things."

"No," said I, "they don't." The simplicity of this view made me smile, albeit bitterly. "What an unvarnished statement, Carmen," I added.

"No use in varnishing such things."

"You are becoming unvarnished in more ways than you realize," said I. "I'd be sorry to hear anyone call it battered."

That hurt. Her eyes lighted again. "You have never been in the habit of saying nasty things, Harry. Be careful, or you'll regret something."

"My heart is overloaded with regrets now, Carmen," I told her.

"I mean something more than that," she warned.

"I doubt if you could add much to the burden."

"Don't invite trouble then. Have you done with your homily? If you have I'd like to get to bed."

"Is that what you call it?" I asked.

"That's as good a name as any for it," she said, and went back to her bedroom.

So I did not get to sleep early that night. I heard the clock strike two, and three and four. At daylight I was dozing. I awoke to look at the pink and white face on the pillow opposite mine, at the tumbled hair of gold, at the round, white arm thrust out toward me, and the pink-tipped fingers to the very curves of which extended the lines of beauty that characterized all the rest of my lovely wife's beautiful figure. She looked so sweet and so gentle, so artless, so wonderfully perfect in feature and color, so innocent, so pure a human flower, that I

groaned aloud at the memories of the night. The feeling that I was making mountains of mole-hills had alternated with the flush of shame over my discoveries, but the bitter pain in my soul was not assuaged nor the feeling of helplessness dissipated.

Distrust is a virulent poison. Once it is in a man's system, too, it is almost impossible to eradicate it. I meant to trust my wife. I wanted to trust her. But I couldn't. I had no evidence to add to the one direct bit that had come to me, and I felt no inclination to spy for more against the girl I loved. To say that I was unhappy after the night of the bridge party, is to tell merely a bit of the truth. I went through something very like what would be considered by most people a fair imitation of hell, during the next few days, with all the tormenting ideas I had held during my married life, in one great conflict for mastery.

Here was a girl who had come from what appeared to be a good moral home, with what had seemed to be a normally pure and honest mind, with what I had supposed were womanly purposes and ideals. She had lived two years with me, who had loved her with absolute devotion. I had given her everything my heart could devise to make her happy. I had adapted my life to her likes — to her whims.

I had indulged her, given to her ease and comfort and pleasures she had never known before. I had tried to be considerate. If I had offended in the one direction I have mentioned, it was a thing that could easily have been corrected, at sign from her. I had forgiven things that had hurt and stung me to the quick. I had overlooked faults and at least one actual case of near unfaithfulness. I had been loyal. Just once had I yielded to a fool impulse in the nature of a retaliation, in a moment of bitterness. If I had not been her constant companion, it was because I was called from her by the very business that had made money for her. I had sought no pleasures apart from her. She had been and was still all in all to me.

Yet she had cared steadily less for me. She had lost respect for me. She had even lost fear of me and shame before me. She had stooped to low ideals and adopted hard opinions. She followed her own selfish way, regardless of me or mine. She concerned herself only with the good time of the moment and gayety constituted a good time. She had adopted standards that were loose, at best. She had chosen unworthy friends and alienated our good ones. She was wrecking our happiness.

I had known it, a little. Only a little, however, had I realized it. I had thought her capricious

and whimsical and had believed that to overlook and indulge was the sure way to prove the sort of generosity that would draw her closer to me. And what was the result? Failure — blank, dismal — yes, shameful tragic failure, was looming up ahead of us, with a certainty that was overwhelming.

As I have said, distrust is a poison. It distorts the vision. It unsettles the judgment. When I found, a few days later, certain books of the "risque" variety so popular among women in recent years, among the things Carmen was choosing to read, I made deductions that supported my suspicions. As I watched the indolent life she was leading, it was easy for me to read signs of abnormalities into her habits. How much that I saw was fact and how much fancy, I can never know.

But I did not condemn her. Does that sound as if I held a "holier than thou" attitude toward her? Perhaps it does. It may be that I have offended in this where I have least suspected it. But I blamed myself. The poison of distrust toward her was in my veins, but one sort of antidote I was not slow to apply. What was the cause of our trouble — the primary, root-cause? Was it my own inordinate passion that had broken down her finer sensibilities? Was it my example of careless indifference to most things except business and association with her that

had led her to drop moral influences? Was it my failure to enter into her social life that had opened the door of entrance there for people she should not have known? Had I neglected to guard her against insidious dangers, and were the things I now saw, only the results of my own short-sightedness? Had she been just an innocent child whose mind would take its color from its surroundings and whom I had simply allowed to become tainted by sheer lack of proper precautions? Had I myself opened the avenues and left them unguarded, so that the temptations and the evil knowledge had had free access to my wife's soul?

My mind was a chaos. If Carmen had been my daughter instead of my wife, would I not have felt responsibility? Would I not have interposed a hand to compel changes where I feared unwholesomeness? Had I supposed that the ceremony of marriage put a bulwark about a girl that could make her invulnerable to attacks of the devil himself? And what manner of influence had I exerted upon my own heart's darling, with my brutal lust and my indifference to responsibility? It was a new idea that a man could be responsible for his wife's moral views and for the soundness of her character. Yet why not? What was the guarded girl I had married but an uninstructed child when she came to me

and who had formed her standards in a previously unknown world?

So if the self-righteous feeling existed it did not last. I was humbled, convicted, frightened. And I shall not forget how on the night when this final belief was forced home upon my mind, I cried out to a merciful heaven as I had never prayed since childhood, for forgiveness and help and with desperate hope that it might not yet be too late for me to do my honest duty.

I went to Carmen with this — humble, honest, loving. I made confession and she listened. I told her all I felt. I bared my heart of my trouble and accepted my responsibility. I asked forgiveness and promised my life to her for amends. And she looked at me half incredulous, half incensed at first till something in the spectacle I made in my humility amused her, and she laughed at me.

I argued then. I tried to show her what seemed desperately serious to me, and she ridiculed my notions. She told me again that I was a prig and a fool. She said it in bantering fashion with a bit of her old indulgent manner toward me; but she was unreached by my concern or my love. If I had been a fond puppy, barking at an imaginary danger in her defense and then licking her hands in absurd affection, she would have treated me the same.

Figuratively she tousled my ears and laughed at me and tried to make me play as a cure for my alarms.

She told me I talked like a lunatic about her moral condition; that she was the same Carmen she had ever been, only experienced now and therefore safer. And she said I was shirking no responsibility I had a right to assume. A woman old enough to marry was responsible for her own actions and abundantly able to take care of herself. And she ended by adding that no girl of spirit would brook being "brought up" by a husband. And then she laughed more till she fairly shamed me of my own terrors and my own resolves — for the time.

CHAPTER X

A GLIMPSE OF THE REAL

THE thing marked a sort of new epoch in our experience but it was not an epoch of reform. Having opened my heart to my wife, and having been laughed at, the effect was a double one. I felt somewhat seared by the experience, despite the fact that I had weakly yielded before her. She showed that she felt a new knowledge of me and my limitations.

I began the old routine of indulgence. She took fresh advantage of me. I found that she made nothing now of letting me see more of her real self. For instance she was less guarded in the small untruths she told — the social lies that I despised but could not get her to abandon. She fibbed when the truth would have saved her much trouble and then when she got into difficulties she shifted them upon me. I, fool that I was, took her falsehoods on my own shoulders and helped her out of her dilemmas.

Presently, I discovered that she found an amusement in this and I began to suspect that part of the difficulties in which she involved me were de-

liberately planned, either for the practical joke of it or to test her power over me — or both. Moreover, I found that she was not loath to lie to me now, when it served her purpose and not much ashamed when I found her out. I discovered that she was “working me” as the expression is, and I cannot detail some of the things she did to accomplish some of her ends. She knew my weaknesses now, and she played upon them. She used her power — the power of her youth and her beauty and her sex to make a fool and a brute and a coward of me.

She developed a new and strange thing, too, that at once led me on in her toils and yet alarmed me. She showed sign of sensuality that she had never exhibited before. She showed again and with greater grossness, the loss of personal modesty and reserve that I had not noted before. She became so reckless, so far as I was concerned, as to seem quite indifferent to my opinion. And when the effect of this was first an added recklessness on my part and then a conscience-stricken remonstrance, she turned on me with reminders of what I had said to her of my own responsibility and with new charges against me. And that roused bitterness again in me, that would not down, despite my acknowledgment of part of the truth of her accusations.

Then she grew more fault-finding and afterwards more indifferent and at last I found her suddenly farther away and more separate from me, more wrapped up in her own desires and pursuits and more content to shut me out than ever before. In this phase, she openly used her power over me to compel acquiescence in plans of her working that I did not approve. She showed her disrespect for me. We did not quite quarrel in public, but Carmen did as she liked and showed other people that she did — in defiance of my wishes. And I began to lay up a madness of anger and humiliation and despair for some sure outbreak to come, while I supposed I was striving to follow the ideal I had set up.

Home was nothing to her now. The parades and the suppers and the theaters took all her time. She showed the development of a taste for and knowledge of things to drink that was a threat. There were always wine and liquor in the house now, and we had it always when she was at home. My own taste for it did not develop, because I could see that it hurt my capacity for good work; but Carmen drank wine after a hard afternoon's gadding, whisky as a night-cap, cocktails as appetizers, liqueurs after desserts. She did not take up cigarette smoking in public, though both Isobel Grail and Ethel Furniss were conspicuous in the set that did. She insisted

that I dispose of the electric runabout I had bought her, purchase a large car and provide her with a chauffeur. And, as my absurd success with my little invention furnished the money, I did it all. After which she used her car for fast driving in the boulevards till her name got into the papers more than once for her doings.

I began to recognize now that I had a fast wife. I had hoped against hope before. But she was playing the game she had chosen at a pace that fairly dizzied. The effect upon me was that hope faded and I began to let go of my own ideals. I began to care less. I began purposely to dull the pangs that still attacked me. I began to seek amusement and consolation for myself, and to disregard the nausea the situation engendered. I became an outspoken cynic for a while, and tried to live as I talked; and Carmen laughed at me for that, when she found it out. I took to club-life — a thing that had not previously attracted me. And so it was that I got new glimpses into other lives.

Long ago Carmen had entirely cut Alice Hyatt off her list of acquaintance and I had not even heard about her of late. In an especially unpleasant frame of mind toward Carmen one evening, because she had quite ruthlessly left me without even an explanation as to her engagement, I took a perverse no-

tion of calling at the Hyatts' to see my old friend. There was little enough of pleasure to expect now from such a call, but I take it the worm was beginning to turn and this was the first sign of it.

Alice received me. Dan was away, but a Mrs. Carter, a middle-aged woman friend, who was present obviously with a view to the now-approaching arrival of the stork, made an excellent chaperon for us. I found the girl changed not at all — or if changed, only the sweeter for the signs of approaching motherhood upon her. And how it sobered me — that sight of her, the sound of her sweet, cordial voice, her friendly manner, unchilled by our neglect, her old, characteristic kindness and stanch faith in her friends.

I went there with no intention of making Alice Hyatt my confidante. I am not given to confidences — these confessions notwithstanding. But I told her an amazing number of my troubles. By some rare sense of my need, she managed my opportunity and, though she did not invite it, she made me feel that I could tell her all I cared to express. So, in intervals of Mrs. Carter's occupation with work elsewhere in the house, I found myself relating to Dan Hyatt's wife things I would not have dreamed I could talk about to anyone.

I was a strange experience. I could not recall all

that I told her, even the next day, when I tried. It was not exactly the whine of a hurt cur, I think, for the very fact that it was Alice Hyatt in whom I confided, makes me rather sure I said no unworthy thing. But I did tell her some of the troubles of my heart. I told her about missed content and some of my disappointed hopes. I confessed to some of the mistakes I had made. I did not complain of Carmen nor of my lot. I analyzed a little aloud to her, and let her help me, without telling her that Carmen and I were at outs and that I despaired of winning my wife back.

Of course, she knew, clear-sighted woman that she was. But our talk was mostly in generalities and hers particularly seemed to have no special aim at my case, but to cover some of its points just the same. I shall not attempt to detail it all. I felt her friendliness and her broad-hearted understanding and was cheered and inspirited by it. There was not a suggestion of the personal in our relation and would not have been, had her condition been different. A man does not make love to a woman about to bear another man's child, but I know that no other woman, except my mother, has ever won my gratitude as Alice Hyatt did that night.

When my call was ended, I went to the club and met one or two business acquaintances there. I

have reason to remember well what occurred. We played a game or two of billiards and afterwards made up a table for poker, an unusual pastime for me. But I could not endure the thought of going home. I did not want to see Carmen until some of the things I had gotten from Alice had sunk into my heart. Besides, my mood was such now that I felt my time alone at home — waiting for my wife's return — would be unendurable. So I sat in at the poker and played and lost and won. I am not an expert card-player, however, and others at the table were, so my losses, though not heavy, were noticeable. You may imagine the irony with which a remark on this, in friendly chaffing, from one of the men, struck me.

"Unlucky at cards, lucky in love," he quoted at me, for he had seen my pretty wife — in whose fame I shared, as the humble husband.

"Lucky in love!" What a mockery! I sat at that gaming-table until two in the morning trying to lose enough to concern me so that I could forget that ridiculous phrase. And then a thing occurred that might have been planned by the fates to justify the prelude through which I had been passing. A telephone message came to one of the men at our table, the purport of which was carelessly, laughingly noised about. A well-known member had sent word

that he was in difficulty and needed a friend to help him out. He had been arrested at a road-house on a country highway and it was readily whispered that there were women with him. We laughed. Then his name came out. It was Dan Hyatt. And without pausing to reflect over it, I volunteered instantly to take his relief upon myself.

Nobody seemed to begrudge me the task, and, my thought upon Alice and the need to protect her, I got a motor and I started out. It was three o'clock when I arrived at a small country hostelry and found Hyatt. But I found that he was not my only acquaintance in the party. Arnold Granden was there also, and two women who were reported to be asleep in upper rooms.

I need not detail my feelings. The natural unavoidable suspicion was instant and stirred my blood as it had never been roused before. It did not even need Dan's exclamation on meeting me—"Good Lord, Harry, you?"—to wake bitter forebodings on my own account, the instant I saw Granden. But I asked no questions about the women. It took some hours to get the trouble straightened out. They were in durance for fast driving and "disorderly conduct," as a country constable told me. So I produced money enough to iron out legal wrinkles and secured their freedom.

In my heart the fierce debate as to what else I should do went on through all the business. I did not make up my mind until my friendly task was done. I had visions of myself confronting Granden. I thought of sending a message to the sleepers in the upper room. I contemplated throwing upon Dan Hyatt the onus of the thing and forcing him to accept responsibility. I thought of things that would have turned that night of joy-riding into a morning tragedy, too. But what I did — at the end of the dickering — was to get into my car again, gravely say good-by and drive back to the city and my club, where I got a bath and fresh clothing and went to my office without going home; and it was four o'clock in the afternoon when I called Carmen up to ask if she had worried over my absence. She had not. She told me she had retired early and slept soundly and so had not known I was not at home until morning, when she had concluded that I must have been called out of town. And that was the way I effectually barred the gates of my mind to a thing I did not desire to know.

We dined together at home that night, she and I. She was demure, rather more kind than of late, and she had no plans for the evening. So I telephoned for seats at a popular theater and we saw the play. When it was over we came home to-

gether, like any well-mated pair, and lay down in our bed together, with a good-night kiss, easily bestowed. And Carmen slept, while I stared at the pink ceiling of our room, on which fitful light from outside played through waving lace curtains, and nursed a fire that seemed to be consuming my brain.

I met Granden a week later in the club. He stopped me as I was passing him and asked me to step up to his room, for he lived in the place. We went, and, when there, in his bright cheery quarters he produced a sum of money and offered it to me.

"I meant to get this to you sooner, Harry. It's my share for the other night," he said.

I looked him in the eyes and he winced and faltered. If he had not, I think I should have killed him there on his sunlit floor. As it was, I simply refused the money.

"My advance was a loan to Hyatt, Granden," I said. "He'll pay it when he gets around to it."

I left him standing at utter loss. He could not run after me, as most men would have done to pay a simple debt of honor. The next day, Dan Hyatt sent me a check. I did not see either of them again for a time.

I went to see Alice once more a few days later. She received me, but she would not let me stay. "Please don't, Harry," she said. "Don't come

alone. If Carmen won't then you must not. It's kinder." So I went away again. Dan was out. I had learned so much. Always out he was, I judged, and I began to think of someone besides myself, for a little while.

And then days passed by without any event putting an ugly head above the surface of our turbid life-stream. Carmen followed her game; I went back to pipe and book, for a few evenings, because I did not like the club.

Then came the night when Alice Hyatt's baby was born and died. Somebody sent for Carmen in the afternoon. It was not Alice. I think it was Mrs. Carter, who knew us well by name. But I knew nothing about it till Carmen came home from the hospital, where Alice was, in the middle of the evening, white as a ghost of herself, and shaken as if she had seen death itself; and she came and threw herself into my arms as she had not done for months. She shook with an ague-like fear, as she whispered her news to me.

"Alice's baby was born to-night — and is dead," she said, without preliminary or comment; and a realization of what she had been witnessing came to me through the short, shivering sigh she uttered.

I was silent. Pity — unutterable pity for the

woman who had suffered — who had yet to suffer and to whom the joy of having her child was denied, filled my heart. Secondarily, my wife's awe and terror moved me.

"She — she screamed awfully, Harry," whispered Carmen. I felt her shudder. "It must be more horrible than anything else in the world," added my wife.

I held her close and waited. I had no illusions as to her regard for me, however; she needed a strong arm — physically needed it — that's all.

"She was delirious," went on the girl in my arms, who had been suddenly brought up against real life for an hour in her wild career. "She prayed — she prayed and prayed, out loud," breathed Carmen.

I held my breath. Her words were vivid beyond any narrative she could have framed, and my heart went out to Dan Hyatt's wife — not to mine.

"They thought she was going to die, but they say they've saved her," went on Carmen. "She'll get well — if she doesn't mind the baby's death too much."

I groaned inwardly and felt a great welling up of longing to reach out and help — to do something, to be something, to Alice Hyatt. And there was still only a dead feeling in my heart for the beautiful

frightened trembling little creature that shrank against my breast.

Carmen lay still for some time. At last she stirred, sat up, shivered and then, as I released her, she rose without a word. She went out into the dining-room and I heard the clink of decanter against glass.

The fetid smell of liquor had been plain upon her breath before. I knew how deep went her emotion. Whisky would take care of it. But the vision of that other woman who had faced death and mortal agony that afternoon, who had prayed aloud in delirium, and who was to get well, if knowledge of a dead baby — and a dead love — did not prevent — that vision made me grip the arms of my chair till I broke the stem from my forgotten pipe between my bleeding fingers.

Next day I sent a bunch of roses to the hospital to Alice Hyatt, with Carmen's card and mine. I don't know yet that it was a proper thing for me to do — and I care quite as little. But I did not tell Carmen about it, because I feared she would make some comment that would render the attention impossible. So, of course I laid the foundation for trouble again in the most certain of ways.

Three days later we heard that Alice was out of danger and doing well, and we went, Carmen and

I, to see her. I found her pale and quiet, but clear-eyed and clear-headed as ever, ready to speak of her dead baby, with slow-rising tears but with never a touch of bitterness; talking of her neglectful husband — for Dan did neglect her — with the same old, quiet affection; planning for the future with courage and sweet simplicity; treating us as valued friends, though we had seen her but twice or three times in as many months.

She shook my hand with barely a special pressure of kindliness. Then she kissed Carmen, who put her golden head most gracefully and graciously over the dark one on the pillow. Then she thanked us both for the flowers and pointed them out to us, and was as warm in her expressions as if we had done a dozen things to lighten the burden of her frustrated maternity — instead of a tardy trifle that had no value whatever. She seemed to think that anything done for her voluntarily by another was a gift of finest sort, and it was neither forced gratitude nor false humility that prompted her. It was the genuine kindness of her heart, indeed, that endeavored to make the giver feel that the gift was valued, but the evidence that the gift was truly valued was unmistakable. The truth is that Alice Hyatt possessed a heart big enough to love everybody and to treat all with the perfect

charity that suffers long and is kind. She was the sort that made allowances for her enemies' reasons for disliking her, and who went on the principle that all people would be good and kind but for some sort of false impressions, misunderstandings or misapprehensions which it was the part of true charity to take into consideration in judgment. She did not forgive slights and unkindnesses — she failed to recognize them. To her, men and women were like children, who might be cross because of stomach-ache or naughty because uninstructed or untruthful because frightened; and she treated them accordingly with a broad view which ignored the immediate symptoms and looked for the causes — and the cures.

But while I was seeing new evidence of these qualities in Alice Hyatt, Carmen was seeing just one thing that shut her eyes to all the rest. That was that I had sent to Alice a bunch of roses without her knowledge. When we were alone again, she opened the matter at once. She exhibited jealousy, pure and simple, to my complete astonishment.

"So you sent Alice some flowers, Harry," she remarked.

"Yes," said I, "with your card and my own."

"Why didn't you let me send them?"

"You didn't suggest such a thing."

"And you were afraid I'd insist on doing it myself if you suggested it?"

"I was afraid you might not want to send them."

"So you took this way of doing the thing that would be most considerate of me?" she asked sarcastically.

"I wanted to send some flowers to Alice and took the most direct method. In what have I offended?"

"You've made me appear — thoughtless, to say the least."

"Nothing of the kind. Alice does not know that I sent the flowers. She had both cards."

"She knows that I never would have sent a bushel of them, as if I were starting a market," said my wife.

"She will never know, unless you tell her, that you did not instruct me to send her flowers, and that the overabundance was merely due to a man's lack of taste."

"Harry," said Carmen, "you are overfond of Alice Hyatt. You may as well admit it."

It was characteristic of her that she changed her angle of attack when she found her first move checked.

"I have great respect and honor for Alice

Hyatt," I answered, "and I am enormously sorry for her."

"That seems rather extravagant sympathy for one married man to extend to another's wife, under these peculiar circumstances."

"We won't go into the circumstances, my dear."

"Well, it's hardly necessary. Alice has been sick and she's lost her baby, but the same thing has happened to many another woman. There are other troubles quite as big."

"Yes," said I, "and some of those other troubles belong also to Mrs. Dan Hyatt."

Carmen looked up at me sharply, but I showed no further sign of the knowledge I possessed. The remark worried her, however, though she did not quite venture to question me. Presently she started on a new tack.

"Well, I don't like it," she said.

"I'm sorry," I replied briefly.

"Sorry for what?"

"That you don't like what I have done, but you so rarely do, Carmen, that I despair, at times."

"I'm overcritical, am I?"

"I didn't say that. I have too many shortcomings of which I am keenly conscious, to accuse you of that."

"Don't put on that mock humility with me."

"I assure you I am growing more earnest every day."

She paused. Then she looked at me again. "Are you?" she asked. "Then I suppose the time is not far off when all these things will come to a head."

"I suppose not."

"Then, the sooner the better."

"If you mean the same things I do, the first move must come from you."

"I'm not sure that I do. But I can make the first move anyway, and I will."

I asked her no questions as to what this meant. I was quite certain it did not mean that we were any closer to a reconciliation. I was too bitter to care just then, and I believe it was at that time that I first felt the wish to be released from a relation that was growing less and less of a joy each week — more and more of a torment.

I was more or less expectant for a few days, but, when nothing happened, I plunged anew into my business and tried to forget, at least during daylight hours, that I had no happiness in my home. Then, one afternoon, it became suddenly necessary for me to go to a neighboring city, and I ran home from the office at an unusual hour. I had no suspicion that anyone would be there, but when I put

my key in the latch of my door and opened it, I came upon Carmen and Granden standing together in the middle of our living-room.

The surprise was complete on both sides. If I had known they were there, nothing could have induced me to try to trap them together. But the shock of finding them was so great that I had difficulty in thinking. I remember the great, painful throb of my heart, the instant I saw them. My throat went dry as if I had been breathing through my mouth. I felt a trembling upon me that I could not control. But I managed to walk into my home with some show of self-command at least, and I followed the first impulse that came.

It was a curious one. I felt an overwhelming desire to let Arnold Granden feel that, in no sense, did I consider him a threat upon my peace of mind, and that was the controlling influence upon me. I looked at the two and laughed, as easily as if I had met them at a corner of the street after knowing that they were out together.

"Hello," said I. "Quite a surprise. I didn't suppose anybody'd be at home at this hour."

Then without giving them a chance, I went on to explain my own sudden appearance, growing cooler all the time. "I've got to go away for a couple of days, Carmen, and I came up to pack my

grip. You'll excuse me, both of you, won't you, if I hurry?"

I beamed upon them. Granden had turned white to the gills, and Carmen, though she had not changed color, stood as rigid as if she were paralyzed. They acted about as naturally as if a live panther had slid into the room instead of husband and friend, and a sense of their position was written all over them. Whether or not there was guilt in it, I did not even stop to think. I held up all my other feelings, as it were, while I carried out my one intention not to lower my pride to Granden.

I passed on into my dressing-room, raked a bag out of my closet and began to pack it. My hands were trembling slightly and I noticed it because I barked my knuckles in trying to manipulate the catches on the grip. But I was under that sort of control that comes after the first shock of a disaster, when the mind reaches out to discover primarily what damage has been done and to find a course that will avoid more. I heard the low voices of the two in the outer room, but did not attempt to listen. I thought of whistling to indicate a careless attitude, but decided that that might be overdoing it. I felt surgings of madness rising inside of me and stopped them as if they were surges of blood that I could divert or check before they reached

my head. I felt that, if I let one of them get into my brain, the result would be a pitiful wreck of everything, and that it would be so much better to think first. But when my brief task was ended, I went out, through the living-room and to the door, with almost a fear that Carmen would make it necessary for me to kiss her good-by — or to refuse in Granden's presence.

"Arnold's going to take me to the matinee, Harry," said my wife to me, as I issued from my room.

She had gotten her hat and was pinning it on before the big mirror. She was quite as cool as I.

"That's good," I answered, hastily. "Have a good time."

I paused to pencil the name of city and hotel to which I was going, on a card, and laid it upon her desk. Then, as her absorption in placing her hat straight seemed to give me an excuse, I turned almost gaily to the door.

"Well, good-by till day after to-morrow. Better have Isobel come and stay with you to-night, so you won't be lonely. Sorry to hurry so. Good-by."

I ran down the stairs and off down the street with immense show of hurry. At the corner of the

street I looked back, saw the living-room curtains drawn aside, and I waved my hand back at them, as if with kindest affection. And before I reached my train, I ran into two different men on the street, who thought I was drunk, because I did not see them.

CHAPTER XI

BROKEN TREASURE

IT was when I returned that our quarrel came. I debated constantly while I was away, endeavoring to think out my situation, and a right course to follow. I came to the conclusion that there was only one and that was to tell Carmen that the thing must stop. I tried to think of many sides of the case but my head seemed not to be clear enough to grasp more than the one. We were getting close to disgrace now. Discovery, by another person, of the things I had seen would make scandal. So I made up my mind.

Carmen had planned to go out to the theater the night I returned and, for the first time in her life, I thwarted her.

"No," I said to her, when she told me at dinner. "We're going to have a talk to-night that won't wait till to-morrow."

"Why, Harry," she exclaimed, in her usual politely easy way, "I promised to go — I can't possibly disappoint my friends."

"You needn't," said I, "if you feel like going after I talk to you. But I'm afraid *I'm* going to disappoint them."

She did not answer that. She waited, looking at me questioningly once or twice, but finishing her dinner slowly. When we were in our living-room, afterwards, I stood before her, where she sat in the big chair, with her inevitable manicure-set out for a final polishing of her pretty nails.

"Carmen," I began, "I will stand for a good many things, but I think I have reached the limit now. I want some consideration from you and I propose to have it or I'm going to — bust up the game. Is that clear?"

I had never spoken so to her before, and I compelled an attention from her that she did not usually accord. She dropped her hands in her lap and looked at me in a curiously awakened sort of way.

"Consideration?" she asked.

"Yes," answered I. "I am quite aware that you care nothing about my happiness, but that doesn't rest with you any longer. You have got to care for my reputation, however. If you won't, I'll have to take that out of your hands, too. Do you understand?"

Her eyes narrowed at me. "You're getting nasty, Harry. Look out."

"I'm not only getting nasty, Carmen; I'm getting angry, at last," I told her. "Now, no man is going to compromise my wife without having me to deal with, so I warn you first against allowing it."

"Are you crazy?" she asked me, quite self-possessed.

"I wouldn't be surprised. But, Carmen, I intend to have you do as I say. If you won't there'll be a scandal, and when it starts, it will start with a send-off from me that will make news for the papers, I assure you."

She stared. I think she misunderstood me. She thought I meant to threaten her with exposure; but the way I meant to deal with Granden was in my mind. She looked at me steadily, however.

"Do you mean to say," she asked, "that you are going to make charges against me?"

"I'm going to stop this sort of life we are living," I answered.

She rose slowly to her feet and laid aside her manicure things. I remember that her silver-mounted buffer fell to the floor and I stooped and picked it up. It was as if the blood got a chance to run into my head with the movement and flooded my brain.

"Do you think I have no feelings?" I asked, more hotly, as I laid the trinket on her desk.

"I can see that you are about to try to bulldoze me," she answered.

"I am about to exercise one right of a husband that I have never used before."

She laughed suddenly. "Authority?" she asked. "You're a bit late, now. You began wrong, if that's your notion."

"I know," said I, "I began wrong. But I'm going to begin over, now."

"Oh, no, you're not," she said.

She made an attempt to pass me and end the conversation then and there by indifference. But I took hold of her arm. I suppose I was rough and hurt her. She cried out quickly and dodged away from me. As luck had it, she ran against a stand and knocked it over, sending a handsome rose-bowl she had recently bought to the floor and smashing it utterly. Whether she had been much roused before, I cannot tell; she was used to overcoming me easily. Now, however, she suddenly flew into a passion.

"There — look at that!" she said. "See what you have done."

I had had my share in doing the damage, but her blaming me for this comparative trifle fanned my wrath high also.

"Don't you try to get away from me," I said harshly. "We're going to talk this thing out now. And I want you to know you've got an injured husband and not an indulgent fool to deal with to-night."

She measured me, her eyes alight with her anger. "You let me alone, Harry," she cried. "Don't you keep me from my room. I'm going out, and neither you nor anyone else can stop me."

"We'll see about that," said I. "I have a notion I'll rule this house for one night, at least."

She made a sudden run to pass me. I reached out and caught hold of some loose lace or similar stuff on her gown. It tore instantly with a great ripping sound and she stopped as short as if I had torn her flesh.

"Oh, oh!" she cried. "Her eyes came up half terrified, but still with mad rebellion in them, too. Then she began to cry — openly, without facial contortions, with the shining tears running out and down her lovely cheeks, but with head up and color high, without attempt to dry them, with a new abandon coming presently to show she meant fight. She backed into a corner.

"Go back and sit down," said I.

"I won't," she answered.

"You will," I said, "or I'll put you in the chair. For once in your life you're going to obey."

Her red lips set hard. I crossed and took her arm. She started forward so suddenly that I was outwitted for the instant, and she struck me in the face with her clenched hand. I felt it, but I seized her wrist and swung her back till I could catch her shoulders. Then I backed her to the chair and into it.

"Now," said I, "don't you get up till I tell you you may."

"So you're a coward and a brute, too, are you?" she said between her white teeth, set closely on each other.

"You have answers to both those questions," I said. "I want answers to mine now."

"You've made a fine start to get them."

"I'll get answers of some sort. You can choose what they'll be. Do you mean to defy me consistently and continuously? Have you any intention of being anything at all to me beyond spending my money? Do you mean that this shall be a home or just a meeting and quarreling place? Do you mean to treat me as a human being or as the dirt under your feet? Do you intend to keep your marriage vows or break them? Do you want your hus-

band's support, respect and protection, or do you want him to understand that you scorn and despise them all? In other words, what are you going to do with our two lives?"

She was fussing with the torn lace. She looked up, but did not answer.

"Answer me, Carmen," I demanded.

Her lip curled but she was silent. I understood and my fury remounted. "I said I'd have answers, Carmen, and I mean to. If you don't speak out and tell me that Arnold Granden is not your lover, I shall believe he is."

She uttered a sudden startled cry. "You dare not believe it!" she cried.

"If I did, I'd kill him," I said. "Now will you answer me?"

"Yes," she said, "I'll answer you. I've lived with you as long as I shall. You say you're going to have a change. Well, you are. You're going to lose me. Do you think marriage vows, as you call them, are so hard and fast that they bind a woman to a dolt like you? What do you do to make my life happy? What do you care for except for my body and your own vanity? Now, you want authority. You can't have that. You can't have anything any more. I hate you. I've been coming to it for some time. Now it's ripe. I hate you."

"It's of your own making," I answered, "you're a selfish, cold-hearted woman. You care for nothing but your own body and your own vanity. You make life wretched for me and you don't stop at torment — you reach out for dishonor. Don't you dare to tell me that you haven't come close to its edge, for I know better. I know more than you imagine about your doings, young woman. If anyone else knew it, you wouldn't have a shred of reputation left."

She looked at me without a quiver. "You'll have to be more definite than that, Harry," she said, with sudden quietness.

"Definite!" I cried. "What about your being alone here in this apartment with Arnold Granden, the other day, when I came home and found you here?"

She did not wince. "That did stick in your suspicious mind, did it? Well, then know, for once, that appearances can be misjudged. I am neither crooked nor a fool. We were not alone here. Isobel Grail was with us."

I stared at her. "Isobel Grail!" I repeated, "Why — why didn't you —"

"Yes," said Carmen, interrupting calmly. "Isobel Grail was in my room fixing her hair. You rushed in. You showed in your face, instantly,

the thoughts that were in your mind. Do you think I would call her out then, to show to her and to Arnold Granden what a fine, manly, trustful husband I have? ”

She rose to her feet again and stood a moment trying again to adjust her torn dress. It was badly damaged, and she presently gave it up. As I stood before her, quite nonplused, she began loosening the gown at the bosom, preparatory to changing it. In a moment her lovely neck and shoulders were exposed. Still I stood, my mind whirling, trying to adjust my thoughts, trying to understand just what I had done, trying to decide whether I should go on and tell her other things that had made me suspect her good faith toward me or whether I had any real basis for the suspicions I had entertained.

The thing shook me to the soul. Of course I had judged her! Who in the name of heaven, would not have done so? With all that was back of that day, was any other thing possible?

“Carmen,” I said at last, “if Isobel Grail was here, why didn’t you let me know, then or afterwards? ”

“I have some pride,” she answered.

“But no love? ” I asked.

“For a man with a mind like yours? ” she said. She looked up an instant. Then she slipped past

me easily and went to her room. I followed her slowly. At her door I stopped.

"Carmen," I said, "I've been having a horrible experience. If you have not meant to do things that were — indiscreet, appearances have been terribly against you — and against me. I have felt a doubt — how can I deny it?"

"It's been of your own making," she said, quoting my remark of a few moments before. "Now you can gather the fruits."

I looked at her steadily. She was undressing swiftly, with no regard whatever for my presence. Evidently her proposed change of gown necessitated other changes also. Even at the moment of pain and shame and uncertainty I was keenly aware of her wonderful beauty. I never forgot it. It never failed of its impression upon me. And I was partly conscious that she knew that subtle influence that she possessed, as well as I did.

"You're going out?" I asked.

"I'm going out," she replied. "Please go to the dining-room and call Marie to help me dress."

I turned to obey that request. I was half-dazed, but I was not wholly convinced of wrong nor wholly repentant of my part. I had to have time to think. I called the maid and sent her to Carmen. I wondered if our noisy quarrel had all reached her ears.

I hoped not, but was not assured by the girl's demure expression. I took my hat and coat and went out and down the stairs. As I stepped upon the pavement a motor-car was just drawing up. In it was Isobel Grail. She waved her hand to me quickly and I went to the car's side.

"Hello, Harry," she said with easy playfulness. "Is Carmen about ready?"

She put out her hand and I took it. Instead of dropping mine after a greeting, she drew me closer to the motor's side. "You poor boy!" she said. "You work so hard and play so little! Why don't you join us oftener?"

I laughed. "I can't stand your pace," said I.

I looked up at her and a sudden suggestion leaped into my mind with opportunity. I might show her that I knew she was present when I found Carmen and Granden together.

"Sorry I didn't see you when you were at the house the other day, but I was in such a hurry I couldn't wait to shake hands all around."

Her eyes opened wide. "Why, did Carmen tell you we were there?"

I tried not to show surprise in turn.

"Why, yes, of course," said I.

I waited then. I did not know what to make of her plural, but I had not far to guess. It might

have been Ethel Furniss who was the other one of that "we." It might not have been she. I felt a slow contraction of the heart that hurt me as much as its leap on the moment of discovery. But I had no need to ask a question.

"You don't like it a bit, Harry, do you?" she said, still holding my hand, and turning her head away from the chauffeur. "But I can't help it; he will follow me."

I said nothing. I was on the verge of the knowledge I wanted.

"Do you think I am a flirt?" she asked, turning her dark eyes suddenly to mine.

I regarded her gravely. "I have no inside information," I answered her.

"I'm not flirting with Dan Hyatt," she said, unguardedly. "But I would not have it known for the world that he was with us there at your house. You are not angry, are you? It was careless and foolish, but we were going to matinee and just stopped in."

"Of course," said I, freeing my fingers and finding need for a cigar. "You are not accountable to me, you know."

She studied me an instant, as I felt for my cigar-case.

"You are a deep one," she remarked presently.

"What do you mean?"

"Still waters," she suggested.

"I can be quite noisy on occasion," I answered.

"Besides, it's the lack of light you have. In the shadow of the woods, you know, a shallow pool on a bed of dead leaves may *look* deep, and *be* still."

"Yes," she said, "that's good. But you don't have to sound it very long to learn about it."

"We make many a mistake, Mrs. Grail, by judging things from appearances."

"Then," she said quickly, "you won't judge me too harshly."

"Oh, no, indeed," I answered. "Shall I tell Carmen you are here?"

"No; I'll go up," she said.

I assisted her from the car and to the door, rang our bell and left her. And I walked down the street with my limbs shaking again.

Appearances! God, what was I to judge from them?

I went to the club and secured a private room. In it, I sat down in the darkness, at a window overlooking silent, dim roofs and distant lights, to think. I needed quiet and thought alone, indeed, now.

I had no choice but to fit Isobel Grail's story upon Carmen's. I had been doing it from the moment the former had spoken her revealing sentences.

Carmen had told me no lie, but that damnable substitute, a half-truth; and one seething thought filled my mind to the boiling-over point. So far from taking the curse off what I had seen, the presence there of the second couple, so separated from the others that I had not discovered them, seemed doubly sinister. What was my house — a place of assignation? What was my wife — another man's mistress? Or was I crazed with jealousy and obsessed by suspicion as she had said, and was she an honest woman who had done only the unconventional — the indiscreet thing? Heart and conscience fought against appearances and judgment, as I tried to decide — tried judicially to consider and weigh and compare and value. I was actually physically ill with the fever of it, after the violent scene with my wife, and the successive shocks of feeling over revelation and counter-revelation. I was full of a mad passion of vain regret over my own unbridled anger, over the utter ruin of all hope for happiness, over the shame upon myself and the girl I had so dearly loved. I was in a condition of mind and body in which a man finds it easy to wish for simple death to end it all. I was also in the condition in which it is easy to let a grievance become master and the desire for retaliation and revenge become insane.

Carmen's answer to my question about Granden had not satisfied me. I think I did not really believe that she was actually guilty, but I knew now that she cared not a straw for me and did care enough for him to defy the unwritten laws for his sake. A woman is not far from guilt when she does that. Besides, where does virtue end and guilt begin? Is it only with the contaminating touch? Why not with the yielding thought? And no woman lets a man lead her knowingly into compromising positions without contemplation of yielding. How my wild curses on the head of Arnold Granden leaped up to my lips, as I thought that out! How I wished for a moment face to face with him, and how my very muscles quivered with eagerness to strike his smooth, smug, smiling face, a crushing blasting blow! How all the wrong that he had done me gathered itself together to temper the wrath I had felt into a hardening hate, as I looked at the events of the past two years in vivid pictures in the darkness! How that hatred gnawed and snarled under the leash I still held! How the wish to break his life as he was breaking mine rose constantly uppermost in the chaos of my mind, the real essence of its distress! The aching agony of my loss, the utter blasting of my love and happiness, scorched like real fire in my blistering heart.



There is no keener pain than disappointment and shame can make together. They are like water and quicklime in a man's soul. If there is a fiercer torment reserved for some other world of punishment than this, no prophet has ever described it. That dark room, that night, with its extraordinary quiet, with the cool breeze blowing in at the open window and the great leather easy chair as my resting-place, was a hell indeed for me. Once I got up out of my soft cushions and went to stand by the open casement, and to look down — far down into the court, a dozen stories beneath, where the dull glow from an engine-room window lay dim on a black pavement. And I thought for minutes that it would presently be my choice to lie down there in that dim light, with a hateful life crushed out upon the grateful stones. I fairly felt as a tempting thing the imagined dizzy jump, the rush of air about my falling body and the deadening shock that would blind and deafen and benumb every sense in one blessed instant of relief from pain intolerable.

I was close to suicide — so close that my fingers on the window casing clutched tightly, as my body swayed in the unguarded opening, and only barely held me. I was like a man who is wooed by heavy sleep, and barely holds a conscious knowledge of his condition. I could have let myself sink off into

that still abyss, as one yields to faintness — like a swooning into delicious depths of insensibility. But I thought of how they would find me down there — and the pother there would be about it, and how my men friends would look with horror and disgust and suspicion at the pallid, blood-stained wreck of a man and make guesses at my reasons — and I stopped and turned back with only a breath, like a puff of the breeze from outside, preserving the balance on the side of life.

But it had no sobering effect. I was mad with demand for some expression of my rage against fate. I turned to thought of my wife, with sudden wish to wreak some part of the punishment on her. Crazy notions of putting detectives on her track to get evidence against her, for an exposure to come, filled my head. Suspicion like a poisonous gas addled my mind, till I was ready to do any shameful thing.

But some sense of decency returned with a fresh breath of memory of earlier tendernesses and the blur of those thoughts cleared and passed. Self-accusation came back — my rage turned inward. It had been my fault, after all, had it not, that I had not compelled my wife to respect and honor me? Inevitably that was true. But in what had I failed? I knew that it was because I had not kept a hold on

her interest, upon her imagination, perhaps. I had no secrets and such reserves as I had held had hidden themselves from her. It was a case in which familiarity had indeed bred contempt, on her part. There is no truer thing than that a woman is mastered by her curiosity — and the husband is a fool who does not hold his wife's interest by that means. The man who opens his heart and his life to a woman, without reserve, will be like a book that is read or a grape that has been pressed. There is no more worth to her in him. I had done just that. I had turned my life inside out to Carmen and I had prided myself on it. I had been her slave. So I had lost her respect — her interest — and had become a nuisance. Therefore when I had reached too late for the neglected mastery, she had laughed at me, in the most natural way in the world.

When I thought of these things Granden became a mere incident. What had he to do with it? But when I dwelt on him, I saw his cursed treachery toward me and wanted again to strike at him, and so I shifted about, buffeted by contending inconsistent emotions, with a brain as unstable as a drunken man's, while hours fled away.

It was after midnight when I went out and down the stairs. I avoided the elevators and the humming busy rooms with the notion that my face was

haggard and would betray me. I found my way into the street and got a cab. Telling the man to take me home, I climbed in and lay as if in a stupor through all the jogging miles, till I was roused at my own door. There I let myself in, and found weakness like an illness on all my body. The place was still and dark and I went to the dining-room and drank a great throatful of whisky from the decanter before I even tried to make a light. And then, as if the liquor went to my brain with paralyzing effect, I sank down, in hat and coat as I was, in the great chair by the window and lost knowledge at last of the realities of that awful night.

I woke to daylight, gloomy, dull, rainy daylight, next morning at some early hour. I felt somewhat stronger, a little easier, with only a dull, dazed sort of foggy impression in my brain. But I woke to myself presently, when I became aware that I had slept the whole night away there in that chair.

I sat up wondering about Carmen — almost sane again and ready to think of what to do and say once more. But as I started to rise, I found an open sheet of paper at my hand with writing upon it, and was somehow aware that it had been placed there for me. Then I found myself reading a note — a note from Carmen, and learning that there was nothing of mere dream-work about the haunting

memories of the night before. For she had left me — my Carmen.

This is what she had written:

Harry:

I find you in your chair, drunk. I suppose it was a natural thing to complete the debauch you began here last night.

If you have any recollection of what you said to me in your imbecile intoxication, you will understand why I am going. There's nothing to stay for. I'm going home to my mother. Marie will pack my things to-morrow. My latch-key I will leave with this.

I don't want to hear from you and shall certainly not answer messages, so don't send any.

CARMEN.

A cold, inconsequent, cruel little letter; beginning with a false charge and ending with true evidence of no regret. I read it over a dozen times listlessly. Then I laid it on the desk, got up and went to my room. There I pulled off my evening clothes, bathed and dressed in a business suit, with that same strange sense of suspended thought that

I had experienced before. When I had finished, I went to Carmen's room and stood before her dresser, looking at the photographs there. And one, the handsome likeness of Arnold Granden, looked back at me, like a mocking thing. I picked up the picture, and, in a foolish, childish freak, I lighted a match and held it beneath the face, till the print burned and blackened and cracked and was utterly unrecognizable. Then I dropped the card on the floor and looked at the fair pictured face of my golden-haired girl. And slow, hot, salt tears ran over my eyelids and down upon my lips like the tears of the boy whose dearest treasure is broken.

CHAPTER XII

AN HONEST MAN'S DUTY

WHAT is the curse under which we humans are staggering? Is it the curse of sex? Why were we saddled with such a thing? Haven't we handicaps enough without having an appetite born in us, to satisfy which means misery to others or ruin to ourselves like the ruin of the drug inebriate? Or are we modern men and women bearing the burden of our fathers, of a blessing abused? Are we the abnormal products of wrong use of a simple instinct? The burden is heavy.

Sometimes women seem to me to be parasites upon men. There are types that are vampires, indeed. There are women in America who are sapping our national life. Did the Creator mean that this type of woman should be coddled and supported and cherished and pampered at the cost of men's blood and men's characters? Or is she a product of our artificial life, of the pampering process itself, an abnormal being for whom the Creator is not responsible? Is she a perverted thing — a thing that

is like an incubus on the race, now that she has been produced? Did God mean men to make their wives into pets and dolls? Did he mean that men should keep and support them at all, as they do? Were we made to bind ourselves together as we are now taught to live together, the woman a dependent, and ruling by her sex attraction mainly? Or did he mean her to be a strong being, companion and friend to man, partner in creation of offspring, co-maker of home and of nation? We boast of the position of our women. Is it a position intended by the designer of human relations? Is it a position of pride or of shame to be a plaything? And who is responsible — the woman herself, or the man who treats her as a toy?

Some of these thoughts — broken imaginings, echoes of earlier vague ideas upon the subject, coursed through my mind during the few days following Carmen's going. With them came a sick sense of lost faith in women in general, and in the one beautiful girl who had been mine. But always, out of them, came a half-justification and a pity which brought to the front again my insistent spirit of fair play. And my attitude toward my runaway wife became kinder with every passing hour. I believed in my soul that she had wronged me, but I believed that she was not without excuse, partly of

my making. Ethel Furniss had told the truth; I had spoiled my wife.

For a day or two I did not try to send her word. It seemed better to wait. A little time would help, if anything would. Meantime, I lived in my house that seemed empty as the shell when the kernel is gone. In my loneliness the simplicity of my early love for Carmen came back, to a degree that made me half disbelieve in the seriousness of our quarrel. In the long hours of lonely nights I lay dreaming of her in some of the old ways, and finding it an effort to realize that there was no hope now for the happiness I had supposed was to be ours. Marie packed and sent some of Carmen's clothes to her at her home, but I did not let the maid send many things. I told Marie and I told friends that my wife had gone to visit her mother, and that she would return in a fortnight or so. And then I tried to build air-castles about that as an actual expectation.

But the horror of ruined confidence was with me, too. There were hours in those nights when, with my face buried in my pillow, I tried to shut out visions of my beautiful girl in unfaithfulness. I saw her always with Arnold Granden. I imagined his tenderness toward her, his care, his caresses. I imagined favors given by her to him. Did she kiss

him? I could see her red lips pursed up and her head thrown back, to give to him what was mine of right. Did she permit him to fondle her as she had permitted me? I could see her on the arm of a chair in which he sat, with his hateful, smug smile turned satisfiedly on her beauties. Did she dare to grant him more? I could see her round arms, and white beautiful bosom — the loveliest thing God ever made. Did that traitor's eyes and hands profane her? I could not believe it. If I had, I should have gone stark mad to murder him, and could not have lived through a day without searching for him. But I did not believe it. I only dreamed it in vaporous waking-dreams in sickening nights without rest.

People told me I was not looking well. Isobel Grail met me on the street one day and was plainly startled at my appearance. She was serious about it first; then she joked and said it must be loneliness and told me to come and see her. And I laughed and promised and meant to keep away from her.

Then I wrote a letter to Carmen, on impulse one night. This is it — for I have the original still: —

Dear Carmen:

Forgive me. Please come home so that I can tell you all the truth. Shall I

come for you? We've made a wreck of things, but there may be hope for us yet. At least, let's talk about it *once* more.

HARRY.

I sent it. It came back after two days, unopened, simply enclosed in another envelope which was addressed in her father's hand.

I had not anticipated such a thing as this. I wired immediately to Carmen. Three words only seemed enough to send. "Shall I come?" I asked her. And it proved quite enough. The answer came from Mr. Brainard: "Carmen is at Lake House, Lake Constance."

The season was sufficiently advanced now for people to go to the resort, but the surprise was complete. It dashed every budding hope, too, for it sounded like complete, care-free indifference. Moreover, memory raked up the instant association with the former visit my wife had made at the lake. I could no more have helped inquiring then for Granden at the club than I could have avoided thinking of his whereabouts. And when I was told that Mr. Granden was out of town and was having his mail forwarded to Lake Constance, I found that I had simply anticipated the truth. And it seemed evident that my wife had wanted to escape from

me for the escape's sake and not because of our quarrel.

That night I went to see Isobel Grail, in her flat on the neighboring avenue. She received me cordially and alone, and she was playfully full of pretense that she entertained me for Carmen's sake. She talked of Carmen. She was hugely interested in my devoted affection for my wife. She wistfully wondered at the kindness of some men. She was guardedly confidential as to the unhappiness of her own life, and half-humorously envious of Carmen. She was absorbed in all I said — earnest-eyed, alert, sympathetic, deferential. She was beautiful, too, and the very fact that her hair was raven black and not golden, that her eyes were like deep night skies and not a laughing blue, that her hands were long and generous and firm and not tiny and slender, that her shoulders were cool and smooth and white and not pink with warm blood, made her attractive. I was tired of something. I could not say that it was golden hair and sparkling color; but Isobel Grail's quiet, yet magnetic, beauty rested me.

I enjoyed her. Her subtle flattery soothed me, of course. Her clever allusions to my wife and her pose as Carmen's friend — and therefore mine — took away misgivings about intimacy. The sense of novelty about her and the suggestion that she

wanted sympathy from me, leading as such things may to intimacy, appealed to me strongly. My own need to talk of my trouble and her eager willingness to nurse my confidence, compelled and invited. And last but not least, the sign of genuine hunger for affection that seemed to be in the woman's eyes, struck an answering chord in my sick heart that was the most powerful influence of all.

I sat in an easy chair in her dim-lighted parlor. She made me smoke, lighting my cigar with her own fingers, in merry pretense of emulating Carmen, who had never done such a thing in her life. She played softly the music she knew I liked and sang in gentle half-voice, as if intimately just for me. She chose sweet tuneful things, and sang them well. She was at her best at the piano, graceful, clever, appealing. She made the songs a medium of things tender which she would not have said, of the melancholy she would not have spoken, of longings she would not have voiced and I felt her — that vital feeling of a man for a magnetic woman — in a way that warmed and quieted and stirred me, all at once.

What creatures we are! I think no more of myself for that evening in Isobel Grail's apartments. She played the siren, as women always do, when it's worth their while; and I played the fool. No overt act of mine made guilt of our relations, but God for-

give the thoughts that came with the intoxication of it.

When the songs were ended, she came and sat in the deep window sill at my side and was long silent. Suddenly she leaned over me and put her hands on mine.

"Harry," she said, "you are unhappy. That's as plain as your presence here. Tell me; has Carmen made you so?"

I held her fingers. I might have done more but for the up-surge of genuine misery at her question.

"I'm lonesome," I said, managing a grin. "But you are charming the feeling away."

"I wish — I could," she said, quite gravely.

"You do, I say," I responded.

"You look quite haggard," she went on. "You look almost gray to-night."

She looked at my hair consideringly, almost fondly, and still her hands rested on mine. The thrill of the game went through me, but I made no move. She put up one hand with playful familiarity and touched my hair.

"It would curl, if you'd let it," she said. "I've often told Carmen so."

"Carmen never mentioned it," I answered. "She was not so much concerned with my curls as with —" I stopped. I had used the past tense

and my tone was betraying me. I tried to laugh, but Isobel regarded me with softening eyes.

"Harry! It's true then?"

"What?" I asked defiantly.

"That Carmen and you have quarreled — that that's why she is gone."

She bent forward till her face was close to mine and her eyes looked down into mine compellingly. I could not deny the truth that was racking me.

"We have had — a little tiff," I said, gravely. "Carmen did not quite forgive me when she went away. I shall be rather miserable about it till she gets back."

Mrs. Grail lowered her eyes a moment but she pressed her hands heavily on mine. Then she looked at me again.

"I should think a woman would sell her soul for a love like yours," she said.

I had no answer for that. I looked in her eyes, and saw them slowly fill with tears. I was conscious that this was ground on which people situated as we were, had no right to stand together, but I was both touched and excited by her. I pressed her fingers gently. Suddenly she dropped her comely head down upon her hands and sobbed. I put my cigar on the tray at my side and touched her hair with my free hand. Still I could say nothing. I was not

quite idiot enough to offer verbal comfort. So, it lasted for a long still moment.

Presently she raised her head and freed her hands and dried the tears away carefully and in silence. I folded my own hands over my knee and waited, watching her.

"You are kind," she said after a moment.

"Kind? In what?"

"In your sympathy — in your attitude toward any woman."

I smiled. "I have always had the truest regard for women," I answered, and recollected the modified form of this statement I had given to Ethel Furniss.

Isobel rose, went to the mantel across the room and returned with a match, to light my cigar.

"I've spoiled your smoke," she said.

I lighted the half-burned cigar, leaning forward to do so. Then I sat regarding its glowing coal between my fingers. Abruptly, I was conscious that she was bending over me and I felt her arm upon my neck. Before I understood, she touched my forehead with her lips. She had kissed me!

I turned instantly, but she was quicker, and moved away from me and back to the mantel. I rose and followed her, but she held me off with her hand when I would have come closer.

"Harry," she said, "you are too good and too honest a man for a woman to play with safely."

"Safely!" I repeated.

"Yes — safely — for herself," she answered.

It stopped me. It sounded absurdly like gross blandishment, but it made me conscious that what I was on the point of doing would prove me undeserving of the words she had used. I paused, took her hand and held it.

"Don't jolly," I said. "And don't play with me. There's some show for us to be honest friends, though, isn't there, Isobel?"

My roused blood cooled. It was as if my eyes opened, and I saw new truth about myself, with a vision like what others must have of me. I was like tinder to the fire with a woman — not only one woman whom I thought I loved, but with another, perhaps with all who would let their blaze touch me. Was here an answer to some of my questions? And had Carmen been right? Was I the thing she had said? Were men alike in this? And if so, what was I to think of the strictures I had put upon women?

I left Mrs. Grail soon after that and started back to my house, sobered and half ashamed. In the street I met Dan and Alice Hyatt, out for the first evening's entertainment Alice had enjoyed with her

husband since many months before her baby was born.

They were cordial, and Alice asked after Carmen. I told her my wife was over at Lake Constance and I detected the mischievous gleam in Hyatt's eyes as I spoke — or thought I did. But Alice was quick to be kind.

"In that case," she said, "come over and have supper with us. We've just been anticipating something to eat. I'm hungry."

I accepted. The invitation was just the thing I seemed to need at the moment to take me out of myself. I had not seen Alice for weeks, and the friendliness of her attracted me exceedingly. The dread of going home from my scene with Isobel Grail to my empty home and thoughts of Carmen, was the powerful influence that drove me, however, and I was purely selfish about it.

So we went up to their place, the first time I had been there since the day Alice had asked me not to come alone. I had that feeling of lapse of long time that comes sometimes with a return to the familiar after short absence in surroundings completely strange. But I was made comfortable and treated as if I were the most welcome possible guest. Dan bestirred himself, after his usual fashion, to concoct delectable drinks, while a maid got together

a luncheon for us; and Alice talked to me while she laid a small table in her living-room, in charming, informal way. And then I did a thing I had not in the least contemplated, but that seemed as natural — and seems so yet — as for the small chap in trouble to run to his mother. I told this old friend of mine my own trouble, blurting it out suddenly from the depths of my bruised heart, because I trusted her and knew I'd get honest help.

"Carmen and I have quarreled, Alice," I told her, abruptly, when she had paused after laying the cloth, to put a rose she wore in a vase on the mantel.

She turned to look at me, her quiet gray eyes opening a little wider. Then she smiled. "Your first lovers' quarrel, after two years of marriage?" she asked, and turned to her task again.

"No," said I, heavily. "It isn't our first, nor is it a lovers' quarrel. It is the culmination of a long series of — disagreements, and is distinctly a quarrel of married people. It is far too serious to be made light of."

Alice turned again, half sobered, but still not wholly grave. "I can't imagine it, Harry."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because Carmen is so lovely and you so loving."

I caught my breath. "But she doesn't love me

any more, Alice," I told her painfully. "I haven't known how to hold her love."

Alice was smiling more decidedly. "Nonsense, Harry," she answered.

I couldn't bear that she should think that I would make a confidence of any trifling disagreement with my wife. I spoke quickly, without considering further.

"Carmen has gone away from me, Alice; she has returned unopened a letter I wrote her, and she is at Lake Constance, where Arnold Granden has gone also."

Alice turned sharply, the laugh going out of her face like a light pinched out. Her eyes fixed themselves on mine and the blood slowly ebbed from her cheeks. She did not speak, but her rising distress showed plainly in the disturbed clearness of her gaze.

It was I who looked away. "It was brutal to tell you," I went on, "but the truth is brutal. Besides, I had to tell somebody of whose sanity I am quite sure, and you are the sanest person I know. Please forgive me for loading such a confidence upon you, and tell me what an honest man should do, in my circumstances."

She sat down in the chair at her side, suspending her small labors instantly and sinking down as if it were a sort of collapse, caused by the news itself.

She studied me with an earnest look while her hands clasped themselves tightly in her lap.

"If you are sure, Harry," she began, and stopped.

"I know," I said.

"Then you should go straight to her. Go to-night."

I started. We looked at each other for a long moment and I was not conscious till afterwards how completely I accepted her judgment, without question. Presently I found myself looking at my watch.

"It's 10:30," I said.

"When is the next train?"

"There's a train at 1:00. It would get me there early in the morning — and out to the lake before breakfast."

"That's good," said Alice.

I suddenly recognized the almost hypnotic influence under which I had responded to her suggestion and remembered that there was something more to be done than merely to go where Carmen was. The thing was not so simple as that.

"I don't believe she will come back," said I.

"She must have the chance, first," answered the quiet girl, who was now herself again, though sober enough, and whose kindness came out in voice and eyes.

"Yes," I assented. "But if she comes, it is still hopeless. Our ideas of life are wide apart and growing more so daily. Besides —"

"Don't!" interrupted Alice. Whether she read in my face that my "besides" related to Granden, I cannot say. She seemed to and to prohibit my speaking it. "Nothing is hopeless, Harry," she added, and I could not look at her and think she spoke without authority. "We make things irretrievable only when we refuse to do our full share to remedy them."

I thought about it. It sounded true, but the natural retort would slip off my tongue.

"What if the other person wants it to be irretrievable?" I asked.

"You can't fairly judge anybody's permanent feeling by what he does on impulse," she answered. "The greatest troubles in the world are caused by misjudging people."

"But —" I began, and halted, for I was about to present my evidence and I remembered how she had stopped me. In the pause I heard Dan coming in the hall with a tray of tinkling glasses. Our talk was at an end. "I'll try," I promised, with sudden resolve. "Thank you, Alice. I knew you would see straight for me."

She flushed a little, but rose to meet her husband and to set out the glasses. Presently we were sip-

ping cool liquids and listening to Hyatt's latest story, while the maid brought in sandwiches. And I spent an hour there, with a fresh cigar, with more comfort in my heart than I had known for months. The very resolve to do a fair and generous thing helped me. The fact that Alice Hyatt had suggested it did not detract from its merit in my view. The sense of her friendship, and that I had showed her how I valued it, gave me a sort of satisfaction I did not define, but that helped to make peace in my trouble.

I looked at Dan Hyatt that night, with curiosity. I had not been closely face to face with him for a long time, and, knowing more of him than he knew, I was in a position of advantage — such as it was. I doubt not that he looked on me with much the same idea. Still he could not but know that I would draw inevitable conclusions from the compromising predicament in which I had found him at the country road-house, little as I had pried into that matter, and he must have felt some qualms over it, as we sat talking with his wife.

He was as sleek and well-groomed as ever, thoroughly the young man of the world. He was intelligent and alert, full of jokes and stories, a trifle racy in his talk, with the effect of subduing it to his audience. He was watchful and seemed

keen. He appeared competent to take care of his own interests and he was one with whose business another man would not be apt to interfere wantonly. But, as I looked from him to Alice, I felt again the old sense of the incongruity of such a match. What, in him, had she cared for? What had he admired in her? He was not, to my judgment, the man to appreciate her finest qualities. She was never the woman to fancy his mere worldly astuteness which many people admired. Why had she married him? Why had he sought her? They were both pleasing — acceptable, in manner and person. She was a beautiful, a wise, a thoroughly honest and thoroughly charming woman, but these were not attributes essential to the satisfaction of the tastes of a sport. He was a jolly good-fellow, a money-maker and a money-spender — and he was not an honest husband. What hold had he on a pure, trusting, great-hearted woman?

When I left them, the friendly good night from Alice was like a God-speed-you, on a journey she knew I would undertake. I went home and packed my bag, left a message for Marie, and took a taxi to my train. At five in the morning, I was standing on the quiet piazza of the Lake House at Lake Constance and looking off and down on the rippling blue water, dancing in the mounting sun's rays, while

a somewhat overcool breeze made me feel the comfort of the coat I had brought and stirred once more the thought that it was early for summer-resorting.

I deposited my bag by the desk inside and found no one to receive my registration. Having slept little in the Pullman, I therefore made up my mind to have a walk along the shore to get rid of cobwebs in my head, while waiting for my belated landlord. I walked out and down to the beach. On both sides were quiet cottages, yet unoccupied for the most part, their roofs gilded in the early light. Before me was the tiny steamer-wharf, where the water slap-slapped against the supporting piles. In the immediate cove were a half dozen sailboats, with white canvas half hauled up, and taking rose tints from the sunrise. A misty stillness hung over the farther reaches of water and lay upon distant wooded shores. Fishes were jumping here and there with quiet, undisturbing splashes, from which long glassy ripples drew away in curves. Echoes of some early ax-man's chopping came in mellow fashion, and a cow-bell made a murmur, across the water from a meadow over by the woods. A red barn stood tall on the bluff off to the left, and its image made splotches of bright color in the moving lake's surface. Crows wheeled over the edge of the trees and two white-bellied, gray-backed gulls flashed about near

at hand. A duck waddled out to water from some hidden gully near by and a horse in the barn back of the small house whinnied. But not a sign or a sound of human life — except the chopping — was in evidence.

It was wonderfully peaceful, after the city's rush and racket. But it was cold, too, and I walked. I went first down to the wharf itself and listened to the spatting of the wavelets against two rowboats moored there; but I soon found the breeze too penetrating and sought the path that led off to the woods. In a few minutes I was tramping through the fresh-smelling trees, where the quiet was still more pronounced, despite the slow sweep of the breeze in the branches overhead. The beauty of it all impressed me and gave me a new feeling of peace, in spite of the ache in my heart, that had become heavier as I realized how near I was now to Carmen. My head cleared, too, and, after a half hour's tramp, I no longer felt my loss of sleep.

I was not familiar with the place. I had been there before, but never for long or with opportunity to explore. So I kept to the path near the shore and rounded the end of the lake near the hotel. I had no idea but to refresh myself and to put in the time till the people at the hotel might be stirring. I had not even specially sought for time to think over

my situation and the things I meant to say to Carmen, but the opportunity and the quiet brought a flood of thoughts — memories that made me more tender still than I had been after Alice's talk to me, and made me eager just to see my wife. And it was while I was buried in anticipations and hopes — almost hopes, perhaps — of what this meeting might bring forth, that I came to an old-fashioned stile in the fence and, looking up, in anticipation of crossing, I found myself confronting no other person of all the world than Arnold Granden.

We stood still and gazed at each other. He had been about to cross the stile also. He had a rod in his hand and his purpose was evident. His surprise was even more complete than I would have anticipated, granting his knowledge of Carmen's presence at the lake and the reason for her absence from home. My own surprise was momentary only.

I was the first to speak, for I had to give him the cue. "Good morning, Arnold," I said, quietly.

"Good morning, Harry," he responded. His eyes went over me curiously and watchfully. "I did not expect to meet you here."

"No," said I, "I suppose not. I just arrived."

"Going to — spend a little while?" he asked, coming forward and putting a foot upon the stile.

"No," said I. "I'm only here to take Carmen back."

He regarded me closely and silently a moment. Then he recognized that some remark from him was necessary.

"I see," he said.

"Do you, Granden?" I asked. I made up my mind on the instant to give the man a warning now and here — not of the sort that would imply lack of trust in Carmen, but that would give him clearly to understand that I would not tolerate his attitude toward her any longer.

"What does that mean?" he asked with unduly quick resentment for an innocent man.

"It's a warning, Arnold," said I. "It is a man's duty to guard a woman even against innocent indiscretion. It is an honest friend's duty as much as it is her husband's. I doubt your honesty. For that reason, I warn you."

He grew red instantly. He straightened and stood erect. "Do you mean to say —" he began.

I interrupted him coldly. "I mean, Granden, that I have overlooked many things a hotter-headed man would have taken up. Appearances are wholly against you, and if I find them so again, I shall deal with you as I would with any other dangerous or troublesome nuisance."

His face flashed wrath under the sting. "Well, damn *you!*" he cried aloud and put his foot again on the step.

"Don't come over here, Arnold," said I. "If you do, one of us will be likely to suffer severely and the morning is too fair and life is too fair to soil with our kind of a scrap. It may end with this talk. You go your way and I mine and there will be no guilt on our hands. But, if you do not go, I shall not hesitate to take an injured man's best means of self-protection."

"You are making threats without charges!" he blustered.

"The charges are better unspoken and I have told you that the threats are warnings."

"Do you think I am afraid of you?" he asked.

"I can't see that that has anything to do with the case," answered I. "But rest assured that if I undertake to do anything in protection of myself and mine, I shall not stop through considerations of fear on my own part."

"You'll undertake a dangerous contract when you tackle me, Harry," he said with an ugly grin.

The remark could mean only one thing, for I was fully his equal, if not his superior, physically. I smiled in his face. "I understand that to mean that you have already prepared yourself for the

emergency. But you misunderstand me. If the time comes when I am forced to strike any blows, I shall have little reason to care what consequences follow. And that sort of man is an ugly enemy to have, Arnold."

He was impressed; it was clear as the morning. And that was practically the end of the talk for his further remarks were called after my turned back, and I did not listen. I went back to the hotel, found a red-eyed clerk and sent a note up to Carmen, with no notion that I should see Granden again.

CHAPTER XIII

FOUND AND LOST

MY wife sat up in bed to receive me. She was whiter than I had ever seen her, in the pale morning light that came in at the window, but her golden head and her wonderful soft beauty smote upon me like an accusation of cruelty, when I saw her.

She looked at me in a half-scared, half-defiant way and waited for me to make known my purpose. I went to her and sat down on the bed at her side. I reached for her hands, but she pulled them away from me with a quick indrawing of the breath, her bosom heaving under the lace of her filmy nightgown.

"What do you want?" she demanded.

"You, Carmen," I answered. "I've come to take you back."

She stared at me silent.

"I want you to come back, and forgive me and let me try to learn to do what will make home attractive to you. Will you?"

Still she stared.

"What did you mean to do, coming away as you did, Carmen?"

"Divorce," she answered briefly.

"Have you reconsidered?"

She did not answer. The tears — almost the first I had ever seen her shed — came up and stood in her eyes. The sight seemed to show that she softened, and it went straight to my heart. I held out my arms to her, passionately.

"Oh, Carmen, my darling, won't you forgive me? I know I have been shortsighted, uncharitable, suspicious! Come back and let me try again. We've been trying to live on a false basis. We've got to be partners, Carmen — chums — if we're going to be happy. Won't you come back and be my chum? I love you."

Still she regarded me without moving. I would not venture to seize her in my arms. I let my hands drop to the coverlet and gazed at her sadly. Her tears had stopped without overflowing.

"Have you found you couldn't love me, Carmen?" I asked.

She shook her head.

"What does that mean? Do you wish you had not married me? Do you think you would have been happier with someone else?"

She let her head sink back against the pillow and shut her eyes. One great shining tear slid down, then, across her cheek, dropped upon the thin linen over her breast and made a half-transparent spot against the flesh, through which the pink tint showed. She was like a poor little grieved baby, and my heart forgot everything else but her loveliness and my love. I bent over and kissed the place where the tear fell and then gathered her up and held her close, without a sound, with the feeling that all other considerations weighed nothing beside that privilege.

It was a long time before she stirred. When she did, I laid her back upon her pillows, kissed her lips gently and rose. "There's a train at 9:00 o'clock, Carmen. Will you be ready?" I asked.

She nodded slowly, without looking at me. So I went across to the door and out. "I'll be waiting in the piazza," I said, and closed the door.

And then, curiously enough, in the enormous revulsion of my feeling, two emotions struggled up together in my heart. One was immense gratitude — honest gratitude to Alice Hyatt. The other was an excess of hatred toward Arnold Granden. I went down the stairs, told the desk clerk our plans, and then stepped into the porch for another full breath of the fresh morning air. It was still very

early, but two men were waiting there, and one of them was Arnold Granden.

He came up to me. "I want to talk to you privately," he said.

"I think you'd better not," I answered.

"I insist," he said.

"Then we'll walk down that path," I replied, indicating the way I had followed that morning.

"Very good," he assented, and started at once. I followed him. When we were among the trees, he turned abruptly.

"Now," he said, "I want to know of what you accuse me. I am armed, so don't attempt any demonstration."

"You are generous to tell me so," said I. "But I have not the slightest idea of laying a hand on you."

"What do you charge against me?" he repeated.

"Not a thing in the world," I answered him grimly. My wife was going home with me, now, and my attitude toward him was changed. He was but an incident, if she loved me still.

"Don't put me off," he said. "I mean to have it."

"I have nothing to say to you."

"How about your threats this morning?"

"You call them by the wrong name still, I see. But it is immaterial."

His face wrinkled with rage and exasperation. "Damn you, Harry, speak out like a man. It's the woman! It's a fight for her, isn't it? Well, isn't she choosing between you and me?"

I could not hold on to myself any longer. I cursed him from my soul. "No," said I, "it is not the woman. She chose long ago between me and you and now she clings to the choice. If you say a word against her, I'll drive it back into your dirty heart!"

The pupils of his eyes went to pin-points. He looked away and thrust his hand into his side coat-pocket. With a singular tingling sensation upon my skin, but otherwise quite a dull feeling, I realized that I was in one of the crises of my life.

"You lie!" he said, hoarsely. "Carmen loves me. She never loved you. She came here to me and she's mine."

I did not answer. A sort of cold wave went over me and left my muscles hard and steady as taut wire. I walked forward toward him, with my hands at my sides.

"Keep back!" he cried, and I saw his gun come out. It was a nickeled, pearl-handled affair, and I

thought a sneer at it and him. I made up my mind that, if ever I owned a revolver, it would be of blued-steel. And I walked slowly on.

Still he backed. He cocked his pistol and pointed it at me, but his hand wavered and I knew his chances of hitting me were slim even if he had the nerve to fire. And then, suddenly, a little, spitting blaze flashed out at me, and I felt a sting in my thigh. I do not remember hearing the report. Indeed, that is the last I remember, except that presently I was in the center of a whirling mass of flying leaves and moss, in the thick of the maddest fight I had ever entered, with the face of Arnold Granden opposite me as a thing to strike at, at last, and striking great blows at it that seemed calculated to kill if they reached the right spot.

We fought like animals. He had the courage of desperate fear when the combat was actually forced upon him and he fought better than I had anticipated, but I had my cold hatred of him, and a better body than he. So I outfought him. When muscles and temper are both superior a man has a terrible advantage and that advantage was mine.

We fought without great noise. He did not cry out and I made no sound with my lips. I heard him swear breathlessly and foully. He was a choice associate for good women! And I felt him give

ground and yield. I wondered why he did not shoot again or club his gun to brain me. But all the time I drove my blows at his face and warded his desperate efforts to reach me.

I do not know whether we fought one minute or ten. We made an upstir of the quiet wood that left its mark. We broke over bushes and crushed fern-beds, stirring banks of leaves into damp scattered masses, scraping the moss from old roots and rocks and scarring the place with unmistakable trace of our violence. He went down hard. I felt my knuckles twice against his flesh and knew the blows had hurt. His head rocked with them. He grew unsteady first, then tried to rally, but I leaped at him and swung with all the might of my whole body to crush him down. And he fell. And when he was down at last, he lay in the midst of a circle of trampled space that looked as if the whirlwind had indeed been reaped there.

I stood over him. Battered, bleeding, half-unconscious for the moment, he lay on the black wood-loam, his face cut and discolored and blood-smeared and swollen, his white teeth reddened, his eyes half closed — really a pitiful sight. But the hatred in my heart had grown with being out of leash, as hatred always does, and I was a savage. I was glad I had beaten him so. I remembered the girl

in the room at the hotel and what he had said of her, and I wanted to go on and finish the thing I had begun. I wanted to kill him with a kick, as he lay there, like a snake that would only live to strike again. But I turned away.

On the path where he had dropped it, lay the revolver with which he had tried to kill me. I picked it up and looked at it. One chamber only was empty. I looked at the handle. On it were Granden's initials on a silver plate. Not a good weapon with which to murder a man. I put it in my pocket and looked back at my whipped antagonist. He was gasping for breath and was far from dying. He was only well thrashed after all. So I turned to walk away, and almost ran into a man who was standing at the edge of the trees.

He was the man who had been in the porch with Granden. He looked at me without a word as I stood before him. He was a small fellow with a beard, a long nose and a level eye.

"How long have you been here?" I asked.

"I saw him shoot," he said.

"How did you happen to be here?"

"I saw you two look at each other and thought it would do no harm to walk down this way."

"Do you know him?"

"I do — plenty well. I've been watching him the last few days."

"All right," I answered. "See where he winged me?"

My leg was bleeding where the bullet had touched. The cloth of my trousers was soaked with it, but I knew by the feel of it that the wound was not serious.

"Come up to the hotel and I'll fix you up," he said, and started to lead the way. "I'm McMasters. I run the place."

"Good," said I, with a glance back at Granden.

McMasters walked over and looked at him. Granden was conscious and spoke. Then the hotel man came back to me."

"He'll be all right, now," he remarked grimly. "Come on."

"Can you testify to what happened?" I asked him.

"It won't be necessary," he answered. "He'll never peep." He looked sidewise at me. "God!" he said. "You licked him good — but I was half sorry when you quit."

I asked him no more questions. I went back with him to the hotel. I could hardly believe that it was not fifteen minutes since I had left. We

went to a back room where I washed and changed to clothing in my grip. He looked at my wounded thigh, and found it only a skin-hurt. So we bound it up. My face was hardly scarred, so I showed little the results of my fight. And I sat at breakfast with my wife and afterwards in the train, without her asking a question.

I have never seen the keeper of the Lake House from that day to this. I shook his hand at leaving and gave Granden's revolver into his keeping. He was an honest man and he had seen enough to know where the right lay. He has kept a still tongue in his head, too; and so has Arnold Granden.

Carmen and I went home together in a seat in a Pullman. She sat next the window and looked out, rather sadly unlike herself. I sat beside her and held her slim hand for a long hour, first, and then got a pillow for her and let her sleep. She appeared to rest. When we passed through the old home town, on the line to the city, she drew away from the pane and scanned rather anxiously the people who entered the car; but no one who knew us saw us, and on we went again.

As the long afternoon waned, it came on to rain quietly and, curiously enough, we arrived in the city in just such a gentle downfall as had marked our arrival on our wedding night. I said nothing of it

to her, but the ride in the taxi through the long trip from the station and the quiet early darkness in our apartment when my key let us in, could not fail to remind her. And it was by no chance that she stopped on the little worn spot inside the door, and let me kiss her once more, tenderly.

It was like story-book happenings — that part. But nothing else was. She dressed for dinner, without waiting for further talk, and I got hold of Marie and started housekeeping arrangements once more. Then I, too, went to dress and to wonder what I had accomplished.

I had brought my wife home. I had humbled my enemy. For a moment triumph was mine. But what had I to show that it was real victory? Carmen had not uttered a word of promises. She had kissed me, yes — or she had accepted my kisses. That was always her way. But she had not said one word that was not necessary, and there was fresh fear and uncertainty in my heart. Was she finding it impossible to forgive me? Were my offenses against her so much worse than hers against me that forgiveness could not be expected? Was her love entirely dead? She had not answered my question about her regard for someone else, that morning. Had she found an affection for that other man — the man I had that day beaten — had she found a

love for him? If so, what chance was there for reconciliation? For some reason she had chosen to come back with me. But what was that reason?

We sat in our living-room over our coffee, after dinner, and when the maid was gone out, I asked my question.

"Carmen, is some spark of the old love still alive for me?"

She sat in the big chair, as usual, with a foot curled up and her cup on the broad arm. She stirred the coffee idly and looked only at it. She did not answer.

"Does your silence mean that you do not feel sure?" I persisted, gently.

She looked up and then down again without answering.

"Won't you open your heart to me, your husband, Carmen?" asked I, groping for the right chord to touch.

She shifted her position, laid her fair head back against the dark leather and looked at me through half-closed lids.

"There hasn't been much encouragement to heart-openings lately," she answered, coldly.

My hopes were dampened. "Carmen," said I, "why did you come home with me?"

Her eyes regarded me quietly for a long minute. Then she raised her cup and sipped the coffee. "I think there were several reasons," she replied. "One was that I was frightened."

"At what?"

"At being stared at by people who wondered why I was alone up there so early. I didn't realize it was so early — and so cold."

Her slender hands and bare forearms, her white throat visible through the laces, her slim ankle, thinly clad in silk that let the flesh-tint show, all the delicacy of her, suggested anything but pleasure in the raw weather at Lake Constance.

"What else?" I asked gravely.

"I was afraid you'd make a scene."

"You were? Did I act the threat?"

"I've found you can be violent when you are angry."

"Haven't you found anything better than that, and the passion, in your life with me, Carmen?"

"You are kind — when you are encouraged. You are generous — with money. You are brave — in daring to make enemies. You are attractive — to men who care only for business. You are thoughtful — when you aren't absent-minded. You are obliging — when you aren't obstinate."

I winced under the catalogue. "Suppose I am exactly all you say, with all your qualifications, Carmen — on which side is the balance?"

"On the business side," she answered promptly. "Harry, do you realize that you have been unwilling to join me in my pleasures, but that you have offered me no substitute? Has it never occurred to you that it is part of a man's duty to provide pleasures for his wife — to take the initiative in some of them?"

I looked at her incredulous. "Do you mean that I have never done that?"

"You've done mighty little of it."

"What about flowers and confections and theaters, and a motor and money in plenty, and freedom and devotion and a home and servants?" My own catalogue ran itself off my tongue in glib readiness but unpremeditated order.

She sneered slightly. "What every woman has," she answered.

The remark stirred the anger in me a little again. "Is it?" I answered. "By what right does she have them then?"

"By the right of marriage. Every woman expects to live according to her husband's means. For what else does she give herself to him?"

"Oh," said I, more angry, "that's only the bar-

gain, is it? Then he must do more, must he, to hold her?"

"I suppose so," answered my wife. "That's a part I'm not sure about."

"You seem to act on the theory."

"I act on my feelings."

"Haven't you any principles to go by?"

"Principles? Don't be foolish. No woman follows principles. Neither does a man, I believe. We do as we feel."

"And depend wholly on impulses?"

"Well, we have some foresight."

"Have you? Did you foresee this when you married me?"

"I couldn't foresee just what you would be like."

"And you took me — on a sort of probation, then?"

"Something like that."

I was silent. Was this every man's problem, too, or was it mine alone? I tried to see in Carmen's pretty eyes, whether she was sincere. I could see only the prettiness.

"Now let's talk about me," she said suddenly. "Was it for principle you married me? Or did you expect that our life was going to be roses and dew?"

"I think principle had little to do with my love," said I. "That was a passion. But I did think our

life would be something like what roses and dew suggest."

"Humph!" she remarked. "And what have you found? Haven't I fulfilled my end of the bargain?"

"I haven't found what I expected, Carmen."

"What did you expect?"

"I'll try to tell you. I expected love and devotion in exchange for — no, in response to, love and devotion. I expected a mutual interest in and regard for our home. I expected a joint building up of our life, social, business, moral and — spiritual, I guess, too. I expected companionship. I hoped for children — a little — not much — at least, not in a hurry. I hoped for pursuance of tastes we held in common. I hoped we'd read together, go to plays together, meet other people together, ride and walk and play together. I wanted you for your beauty, yes, Carmen. I was enthralled by it. I am still. I am a passionate man, as you have already told me. But lust is not life to me. I have other instincts stronger. You suggest that you gave me yourself, as if, in giving your body, you did your part. Is that what women really think? Is that what any woman thinks of any man? If she does she misses life and knowledge by a million leagues.

A man wants a mate, but he wants to be mated in heart and soul as well as in flesh."

Carmen smiled. "You talk beautifully, Harry," she answered. "You always have. Now, I'm going to tell you something I had not expected to tell you. I know you very much better than you think I do. I know men in general better than you think. I haven't changed my opinion of you or of other men a particle since we last talked on this subject. Now, if you can tell me how a man like you can expect a woman like me to bind her whole life up in him, when at the same time he is loving one or two or three other women quite as much as he loves her, it would be interesting to know your theory."

"Carmen!" I cried.

"Now, don't put on any hypocritical heroics," she cried, stopping me with a wave of her hand. "I know just what you have to say.—what every man says about single-heartedness and unwavering truth and fidelity. I know what all you men have been saying about women, too, from the beginning—how you have charged us with fickleness, how you consider us changeable and faithless, how you endow us with all the paltry little meannesses of character and inordinate selfishness. But, if you are capable of answering straight questions, answer

me these. You are in love with Alice Hyatt, are you not? You are infatuated with Isobel Grail, aren't you? You are not indifferent to Ethel Furniss, are you? You are not indifferent to any woman who will look at you — and many of them will because you are good-looking. But you are as ready to reach for the thing that attracts you as a baby. Each woman you meet, who glitters on any side that's turned to the light, you want. Don't deny it. I've seen it in you and in other men I know, a thousand times. The truth is, men are far more fickle than women. They are far more faithless. They are far less true. I'm not sure that men — all of you together — are not essentially polygamous in your instincts, and can't help what you do. But the thing I argue for is that no woman should be compelled to tie herself wholly and irretrievably to any man. She knows his nature. She knows what he will do. Now, tell me why she is not entitled to freedom and choice and escape — yes, to many loves, instead of one, also, if she likes? ”

I was silent. What perversion of the instincts I had believed to be in all women, was this? Her arraignment of men was as well founded as had been her former tirade, but it proved only a posture of mind. Her charges against me touched me nearly in places, but were wide of the mark in others, and

her sweeping conclusions were pitifully in error. But I did not know how to answer her.

"God help us, Carmen," I said, "if we're like that."

"That's cant," was her answer. "You think I'm guessing, don't you? Well, I'm not. I know the dates and the hours when you have been to see Alice Hyatt and Isobel Grail. I saw you once, when you pressed Isobel Grail's bare arm with your hand. Ethel Furniss told me some of the things you have said to her. Alice Hyatt took it upon herself once to reprove me, after you had whined to her of the mistreatment you had from your wife. You listened once to a shady story, told by a woman, and then charged me with countenancing the practice. You are the perfect, the model, the impeccable! You are the all-strong, all-wise, self-controlled, pious *man*, you are. I am the frail, fickle, changeable, unfaithful woman. But I want to tell you that I know you through and through and when I told you I hated you, the other night, it wasn't far from what I do when I think it all out. You have your influence over me, too, of course — hypnotic, sex-influence, I suppose. When you took me in your arms this morning I was ready to faint with the sense of powerlessness, as I have been many times. But that doesn't weigh when it comes to intellectual con-

sideration of our relations. And neither does the disgusting cant with which you try to silence me."

She stopped. She was trembling, but she was like a little wild-cat in her anger. I saw with a clearness that could not be misjudged that she and I were on opposite sides of a gulf. I turned sick at the hopelessness of bridging it. But I had something to say.

"Carmen, wherever you got your facts — and part of them are facts — you have misconstrued them. I have been to see Alice Hyatt — three times, I think — not because I love her or desire anything from her but friendship. I have been to see Isobel Grail once — last night — because I hoped for some word about or comfort concerning you. I have never said to Ethel Furniss a word I would not have said in your hearing. The night I touched Mrs. Grail's arm was the night Alice Hyatt surprised you and Arnold Granden in a compromising position in our dining-room, and —"

I stopped. Carmen had leaped up in her chair and her eyes were fairly red with her passion. "I thought so! I thought so!" she cried. "I might have told you that Alice Hyatt tattled that! That's what made you so suspicious! That's what made you so fond of going to her! That's it! I see! Arnold was talking to me about his mother

that night and I was sorry for him and that woman came out there while we were in what appeared to be an intimate talk, and *she told you!* ”

“ She did nothing of the kind,” I shouted at her. “ I saw you myself, in the mirror across the room. I was just behind Alice. And I saw Granden’s hand on your hair, caressing you. You say I’m suspicious? I’ve forgiven more things in you than you dream of finding suspicion in against me! I suspicious? It’s *your* mind that is poisoned and it is you who have given offense. But I’ve kept still over what I’ve seen! ”

“ Yes,” she answered, “ you have, and you’ve nursed your notions of my unfaithfulness in truly manlike fashion.”

“ And you’ve nursed yours about me — and about Alice. Alice is an honest woman and she’s been about the only honest friend we’ve had. It was she, I may as well tell you, who told me to go straight to you last night and bring you home.”

“ *She told you!* ” Carmen rose from her chair, her eyes glittering now. “ Alice Hyatt told you how to go and get me and bring me back, did she? Well, Harry, I congratulate you on your adviser; also on your mental capacity. That was a master-move, that was — to tell me that Alice Hyatt condescended from her lofty pinnacle of virtue to direct

my husband how to rescue poor erring me." She paused. Then suddenly she snapped her fingers in my face. "That for you and for her! Go back to her, Harry. Go back and learn the rest of your primer of life at her feet. Go back and take courses in charity and chastity. Go and *love* her, if you want to. I don't want you. She can have my cast-off husband!" She stopped and laughed like an insane woman. "That's it; she can have my frayed, soiled discard! Ha! Ha! You and your purity! Pah! Wear the white cloak over your amours, Harry. It looks fine. Put the same coat over you when you go to Isobel, too! And try it on Ethel! Oh, great! Fine!" She cried out with laughter. "But don't try to put it over me. I can see clear through it, to the bone!"

She ran away from me and into her room. There she slammed and locked the door and I could hear her no more. And I — I sat with a dead cigar and a cup of cold coffee, and stared at a world that was dust and ashes.

She came out no more that night, and her door remained locked against me in the morning. I went to bed and slept, a drugged sort of sleep of utter weariness of my whole being, but I rose without any apparent refreshment. I had not the heart to go to business. I went to the nearest railway station

and bought a ticket to the country and went off to the fields for the day. I felt as if it were I who had been bruised and beaten, and I felt no leap of recovery in the warm spring air. The cold was gone over night, and a gilt sun hung over things. But its heat did not enliven me, or its light beautify my world.

I remembered Arnold Granden's face against the black wood-mold and was sorry I had not killed him. If I had, to-day I should have been in prison; but I would at least have made it impossible for him ever to touch Carmen again. What a fool I had been that I had not finished my task! But it was like my fool half-measures in everything. I had relented. I was always relenting. I was only half a man after all. Perhaps that was what Carmen saw — just half a man, in me; and so she could hardly be expected to retain an interest in me. Just an easy mark, a weakling, a fool of passion and of sentiment, a spineless thing with an appetite — that was all. Great God, what a spectacle was my career! What a joke I must be to everybody!

I walked the country roads and damned the sun and the air and the budding leaves; and women and men and the parents who bore them; and love and life and nature and the universe, and heaven and hell and all created things! I cursed the day I first

breathed and the day my eyes opened to see beauty. I cursed the first stir of my instincts and the first throb of my heart. I cursed the warm blood in my veins and the brain that thought and saw and felt and loved. I cursed self and soul and fumed that I could not die. I could spill my own blood but I had no faith that that would be death. Nothing pointed to it. Everything was doomed to live on and on — to learn to love and then to lose — to trust and be deceived. We were damned before we were born and the God who made us took pleasure in our tortures!

I walked the roads with murder in my finger-tips. I would have killed a woman or a child who interfered with me. A more dangerous lunatic never trod a peaceful path through unsuspecting community, than I was that day. When I am sane, I believe in a forgiving God, so I think my insanity may not be written to my eternal damnation, for the things I breathed and thought were blasphemy indeed. But I had loved and been deceived. I had kept faith and been scorned. I had served and been spurned. I had sacrificed and been spit upon. And hate for all that existed was in me.

I spent all the daylight hours in the fields, with a cloud hanging just on a level with my eyelids and shutting out all things clean and good and bright

and beautiful. And at night, I went home, blind to all but physical objects, deaf and dumb toward all the world and heaven itself, an insensate, brutal travesty of a man.

And I found that my wife had gone once more, this time with all she possessed or that she cared to take. She had looted the house with the ruthlessness of a vandal. And she had left a simple announcement that put the bare fact clear:

This is the end. I've gone for good.
I never want to see or hear of you again.

Unaddressed and unsigned, it needed neither name to show the lover that it was a message from his heart's desire.

CHAPTER XIV

HOME THRUST

SOME sort of balance turned in me that night. I passed the cursing, blaspheming stage, and came to one of dull acquiescence, where I simply did not care. It was not the mood of mad recklessness, in which one seeks ruinous dissipation. It was a stupid sort of worn-out assent to the general wreck, when initiative dies and courage becomes wholly negative. And for days I was in that state.

I applied for and got a two weeks' leave of absence from my office, on plea of illness. I discharged my servants, and settled down to rest physically and mentally. In a sort of torpor, I sat in the house for days, slept in my chair some nights, ate only at odd, chance times when the impulse moved me to go out. I drank whisky for awhile, but it made me sick and I stopped. I quit smoking because I forgot to get cigars and my taste for tobacco, which had been keen, faded out like a satisfied thing. I did not read. Much of the time

I did not think. I have often wondered since if I was not really ill, with some slow fever that did not prostrate me, but that robbed me of all feeling and sense. I remember an eagerness for fresh air and for fresh water. I left my windows open despite drifting smoke and dust or spattering rain. Curtains were ruined and rugs destroyed. Floors and chairs and walls turned black with filth. I did not even notice it. My own person I neglected. I went unshaven and unwashed. I slept in an unmade bed, amid tumbled and soiled covers. I left gas burning for days and answered no telephone calls. I never thought of a bath. I thought of nothing but that I was tired, tired, tired and could not die.

But I woke up at last, of course. After some days without food—I do not know how many—I came to myself, at daylight one morning, with the first realization of my condition and surroundings and found them intolerable. I got up, with a feeling of weakness, but with a sense of health in my veins again, and shaved and bathed and dressed. Then I hunted up a woman whom Carmen often hired for such purposes, and set her to work to clean house for me.

I found that I had stayed three days over my leave of absence from my business, and went back,

with a wish to find the familiar joy of the work again. My strength came back in twenty-four hours after I began carefully to eat, and I found a surprising vigor upon me. My mind seemed to avoid instinctively consideration of my trouble, and I went at my business as a thing that should and would absorb me entirely.

Naturally, I couldn't keep Carmen out of my mind, but I thought of her, somehow, as safely at home, with her mother. I did not believe she would go back to the lake again, or to Granden, just then, and so I tried not to think of her at all. I made up my mind quite calmly that my married life was ended. I anticipated that, sooner or later, my wife would sue for divorce and so make the separation absolute, and I decided that I would not fight any charges she brought and could substantiate. Surely, it was only right to separate now. We could never be anything to each other. And I did not even feel pain over the idea — that is, no added pain. I put my apartment in the hands of the agent to let, and to sell the furniture, and arranged for fresh decorations to make good the damage I had done. And then I worked — all the time, early and late, week-day and Sunday, seeing no one socially, seeking no recreation or pleasure, spending only my evenings at home, reading, and simply waiting for the com-

ing of a new tenant, to be free to tear up my last roots and get away from the scene of our fiasco.

One long, slow month went by, and no one came to take my apartment. Callers came. Dan Hyatt was one who dropped in one evening. But we found little to talk about. I told him Carmen was visiting in the country, and that was all about her. One or two other men came to see me, but I did not encourage them. Isobel Grail called me up, a few days after Dan's visit, and asked me to call; but I would not. Alice sent an invitation to dinner, but I pleaded a previous engagement.

So, one night, I sat alone in the darkness of a summer evening with rain — another rainy night — with my window open and the soft breeze cooling me, while my cigar, which tasted good again, now, burned fragrantly in my lips, when my telephone rang and a message came that overturned life again for me.

It was a woman's voice. I did not recognize it at first, for the distress that was in it, but knew it presently for Isobel Grail's.

"Is that you, Harry?" she asked.

"Yes."

"I am in terrible trouble. Will you help me?"

"Of course."

"We've had a motor accident — oh, a horrible,

horrible accident — and Dan — Mr. Hyatt — is hurt! ”

The shock of it went through me. Trouble for someone else now — someone whom I would have liked to guard more than I cared to help Isobel Grail.

“ Where are you? ” I asked.

“ At St. James’ Hospital. ”

“ So bad as that? ”

“ The doctors say he — he is — ” She stopped and I heard her sob.

“ Do you mean Hyatt is dangerously hurt? ” I asked.

“ He’s dying! ”

The words came from the instrument like a gasp, and I shrank, with a sudden new sensibility to pain. The vision of Alice’s fine face came up before me instantly and in that moment, my sorrow and foreboding for her eclipsed all other feelings.

“ I’ll come at once, ” I said, and hung up the receiver.

I caught a taxi at the corner of the avenue. The hospital was not far away and in ten minutes I was there. At the door of an upper room I was admitted by a nurse, as soon as I gave my name, and, walking in, I found, not the injured man I had pictured lying on a bed of pain or unconsciousness, but

Isobel Grail, Arnold Granden, a police officer and — Carmen.

I stood like a statue, at the side of the screen just within the door, and looked at them. They in turn looked at me. Granden stood stock still in the midst of a walk across the floor, and stared. He was apparently whole and well. Carmen's eyes took me in with a great, tearless gravity. She was so pale that she looked years older than when I last saw her. The police officer, a burly young chap, regarded me curiously. Only Mrs. Grail came forward to meet me. I summoned my strength to meet my cruel surprise, and asked her the first natural question.

"Where is Dan?"

"He's in the operating room."

"What's the chance?"

"They shake their heads."

She was white and tearful. Her usual self-possessed coolness and politic flattery were quite absent. She was thoroughly cowed and awed.

"How was he hurt?" I asked.

"The car skidded and struck an iron post. He was thrown out on the pavement."

"Running fast?"

She hesitated. "Yes, pretty fast — and the pavement was so slippery."

"Anybody else hurt?"

"No." She paused and there was a touch of her more characteristic look in her glance. "Carmen is quite safe."

"I see," said I. "And the officer?"

"He's waiting to hear the doctor's verdict."

"You're not being held?"

"No hint of it."

"Has anybody sent for Mrs. Hyatt?"

"No."

She was very still as she answered that. Her dark eyes wavered before mine, too, and went down.

"Officer," said I, to the policeman, "is there any reason why these people should be kept here?"

"I think not, sir, except to hear how their friend is. He's seriously hurt, sir."

"I know," said I. "But I'm his friend, and his wife is coming; so these people need not wait?"

Granden started to speak, but Carmen reached out and caught his arm. Mrs. Grail made a little inarticulate sound beside me, but they uttered no dissent. The policeman looked at them curiously, then at me.

"They needn't stay, if they don't want to, sir," he replied. "It's a clear case of accident. I seen it."

"Very well," said I, turning to Isobel Grail.

"Please go, then, all of you. I'm going to bring Mrs. Hyatt at once."

I left the room, hurried down and caught another cab. In quarter of an hour I was standing before Alice, trying to tell her, as gently as I could, just enough — just enough. She was calm — amazingly so. She was alone in the apartment, as her maid was out. So she put on a coat and hat and went with me. In the cab she asked me, as she had not at first, to tell her all I knew.

"Harry, I could see it in your face," she said, "but couldn't bear to have you tell me in the light. Was he — with her?"

"He was with Carmen and Granden and Carmen's friend, Mrs. Grail, Alice," I answered, seeing no good in postponement of the revelation, but softening it all I could. How much she knew of Dan's doings I could only guess.

"Carmen, too?" she asked, surprised.

"Yes."

"I thought she was away?"

"She has never been back except the one night after I brought her home. We ended it all that night."

"But —"

"I don't know where she's been. I supposed

she was with her mother. Perhaps she's been with Mrs. Grail."

She was silent a moment. Then she asked a forgotten question quite suddenly. "No one else hurt — no one but Dan?"

"Only Dan," said I. "He was driving, it seems, and the car skidded against a post. He was thrown out."

She did not speak again. I heard a long shuddering sigh and I reached out and took her ungloved hand, where I could see it in the light through the cab window. She closed her fingers, as if half unconsciously and held on to mine tightly. So we rode through the drizzling rain, with the swish of our spattering wheels and the honk of our horn the principal sounds of our going.

At the hospital we stood together in a dim-lighted hall and waited for permission to enter a room into which they had taken Dan. Then we were ushered in by a nurse, whose face was so grave that I knew what was coming. And I stood beside Alice when a doctor came and took her hands and told her with a look and two words that made no sense except in their tone, the thing we feared.

She went forward and left me standing alone. The bed was screened from my view. Doctor and nurse and the wife went to the bedside and all was

still in the room for so long that I wondered. And then I heard the doctor's voice and Alice came out, her face like wax, her eyes luminous but dry, her hands blindly busy with her gloves, her whole body tense under the sort of somnambulistic control that Nature puts on us when our brains and hearts are hurt. And she came to me, and whispered faintly:

"Please take me home, now, Harry. He's dead."

I gave directions that I was to be looked to for all arrangements. Then I took Alice Hyatt to the cab and sat silent beside her through the drive home. At the apartment house, I went up with her, and asked whom I should send for and she told me. I wired her father, in the home town, and telephoned to a gentle little neighbor who would come to be with her. Then I hunted out a bottle of wine in Dan's cabinet and poured some for her, for she looked so white, as she sat at the window, staring out into the rain, that I feared for her. I only left her when the kind neighbor came, and I went home to my apartment to stay in case I had telephone calls, and to make such arrangements as needed to be made by 'phone for Alice.

When all was done that could be done, I sat down again before the window where I had sat in the early evening, and thought over what the few brief

hours had brought. My heart was aching for the sweet woman whose grief I had witnessed, and I was not now concerned with myself. The blow to Alice Hyatt would be crushing, I thought. Evidently she had known of her husband's interest in another woman, but this awful tragedy was no less terrible because of that foreknowledge. As for Hyatt, he had paid a penalty, as it seemed, for reckless living. But the real penalty—the real curse of his doings—had fallen upon his wife. Isobel Grail, Granden—Carmen, I did not pity. The sight of my wife had startled me greatly, but it had not appealed to my heart. I told myself that my heart was dead, therefore. At least, my love seemed so. I was only cold—not even bitter toward the girl who had been my idol. But I was very deeply sorrowful for Alice Hyatt. I would willingly have reached out that night to assuage some of her suffering.

I went to sleep in my chair. When I awoke it was at the ringing of my doorbell, at some late hour. I roused with a half-dazed feeling and went to the tube.

"Hello," I answered, with half-expectation of a summons from Alice.

"Hello," said a man's voice. "That you, Harry? Come down. Your wife is here, and ill."

It was dark in the hallway where the tube was, and I remember a queer little effect of colored light before my eyes, as the only sense of shock I felt. I watched myself, to see whether or not I was moved, as I turned to the door to go down stairs. I felt quite cold, or thought I did. I had neither anger nor distrust. I simply understood the fact that Carmen had been brought to my door ill and that I could not turn her away — at least, not in the presence of others. Illness of some sort seemed a not unnatural kind of sequence to the tragic accident of the evening and, while it seemed strange that she should come home, I was singularly without sensation over that point. I only hoped that it was not Granden with her. I felt that that would rouse me out of my lethargy to do or say something I did not want to do or say.

I met them on the lower stairs, Carmen half unconscious it seemed — and Carl Prince, a club-friend of mine, who appeared to be alone with her. He was carrying her.

"She fainted in the street, Harry," he said to me. "I happened to be close by. Doctor says it was only a faint — but she doesn't get over it. I brought her home."

He panted between the sentences. I was stronger than he and took my wife from his arms. She was

as white and still as if unconscious, but her eyes opened a little once. I carried her swiftly up the stairs, Prince following with wraps and things. In the living-room, I laid her on the divan, her little figure not filling the space from end to end by a foot. I asked Carl to call our family doctor on the 'phone and I loosened Carmen's gown and found heart-beat and respiration in progress. Then I got her a glass of neat brandy and she swallowed it readily, the pink coming into her cheeks almost instantly after the fiery stuff was past her lips. I thought then that she was conscious, though she did not open her lips again.

Prince finished 'phoning and came and stood beside us. He was a young chap, evidently much stirred by this incident and his share in it — doubtless a little moved by the loveliness of the woman he had chanced to serve. It made me feel kindly toward him, for he was almost reverential in his attitude toward my wife. He told me the story, so far as he knew it. He had seen Carmen walking alone from the door of one of the big down-town hotels and had noticed that she seemed to walk uncertainly. He knew who she was, though he had never met her. When he saw her stop outside the hotel and lean, in evident distress, against a pillar, he went to her at once and offered assistance. But

before she could tell him the trouble, she sank down in a faint.

He had carried her into a drug-store close at hand and summoned a physician who gave her a stimulant and said she would soon be all right. And, after that, it had been a cab and home. No, she had not spoken of the cause of her illness, but had seemed very grateful for his help. And she had seemed to lose consciousness again just before they reached home. He was afraid she was hurt, or seriously ill.

When the doctor came, Prince took himself off, however, with sufficient delicacy. Dr. Wallace, who knew Carmen well, pronounced her trouble exhaustion. He said she had had a nervous shock of some sort and seemed to be run down. It was not very serious. Better put her right to bed and have her rest for a day or two. He would see her again in the morning and learn what had caused the trouble. Then he went also and I was alone once more with her.

She lay quite still where I had put her on the couch. She was breathing naturally and her pulse was quick under the influence of the brandy. But she did not answer me, in any effort I made to rouse her. I had no maid on whom I could call and it was long after midnight. It was my part to take care of her. And never in my life has a stranger

feeling come over me than that which made my heart beat and my hands tremble over my task.

Strange situation surely! She had left me, with a promise not to return. I had believed my love for her gone utterly. She was actually no more my wife than as if we had never married, yet the fact of our marriage stood. And she had been brought home to me by a man who did not yet know of our broken relations, and left her, unconscious, unable to do for herself, with no one in all the world to do for her, save the husband whom she had repudiated. And his hands, from which she had fled, must be the ones to minister intimately to her.

She seemed to be in a sort of stupor, half waking, like the early stupor that alcohol puts upon a susceptible brain. I tried to make her understand that I must get her into her bed, but she would only turn her head, half open her eyes and seem to lose herself again. She had lost her paleness now, and I had never seen her lovelier, her hair loose and waving about her pretty head, shining in the light; her round white throat, bare to the air; the fine color in her cheeks and in her beautiful lips; her slim little form, straight and slender and delicate, but with lines that no art in all the world can portray. The very sense of her exquisiteness gripped me by the

heartstrings anew, as I touched her to loosen the clothing I must remove.

I had undressed her before. In the fond relation of our earliest happy days, I had done all the fond, tender things. But never had the task seemed what it now seemed — a sort of forbidden thing forced upon me, which I had, at once, no right and every right to do. My fingers blundered in the lacy softness of her gown, because of my very feeling. My heart pounded, till the blood sang in my ears and my eyes turned hot, while I was telling myself that such feeling was shame to me and to her. But I could no more have crushed it than I could have stopped my own throbbing heart or arrested the impressions of sight and touch on the way to my burning brain. If God ever made a woman beautiful in all that could wring the senses of a man, she was that woman. And this had been thrust upon me with no warning.

How can I go further with the telling of it? Have you lived to know the power that makes the judgment swoon and conscience die? If not, you will not understand. If you have you will know without my telling. This is no tale to rouse the impure. It is the story of the heart of a man — one man. I do not know whether there are more like him.

But thought and intent and touch were pure and honest. I would have killed the very senses that stung such feeling into life if they had led me further than duty itself must go. I did not uncover the little white form. I could do without — and did. With all the gentleness of which I was capable, I made her ready to rest, while she lay passive and pliant, but helpless under my hands. And when it was done, I lifted her in my arms and carried her to her bed. And then I went out to my window again, and stood with my hot forehead against the cool glass, and cursed myself for the thing I could not help — and prayed, the first prayer for weeks, for help to be clean and honest and free from that awful burden. And I wondered if there were a God who could hear — or grant such a prayer.

It was two hours later that I went to lie in my own bed. In that two hours, the flood of memories of all that had gone, had stilled the madness. With the desire uppermost to be what I could be to Carmen now; to do what was right; to be staunch and true and — yes, even forgiving; to help and protect if not to love; to rescue, if not to keep — so I went to rest a worn, racked body and tired mind.

I looked first at my wife. She seemed to be in deep silent slumber, and I felt safe to sleep. I only put my hand upon her wrist and found it warm and

moist with a normal pulse assuring me of her physical well-being and then I left her and went to my own room. I lost myself under a cloudlike sense of the calamity of the night, almost as soon as I lay down, in which the face of Alice Hyatt, waxen, agonized, was a heavy, heavy weight I tried to lift up into the light, while some strangely sweet, captivating thing was drawing me down and weakening my vital resolution.

It was daylight when I opened my eyes quietly and without a stir, to instant recollection and to a strange instant knowledge that Carmen was beside me and was watching me. She had often come to my bed like this in the early morning but I did not know how much or how little this might mean. I remained quiet because of the quick dread of the first words that must be spoken, because of the sharp fear that some further wrong I might do, some honest resolution break. I held myself immovable, almost rigid, while I closed my eyes again under the feeling that hers were upon me. Then I thought of feigning sleep a little longer, to gain time, and I relaxed, drew a long breath and took up my pretense of unconsciousness.

I heard her stir. I felt the covers draw across my neck. I knew she had started up to look down full on my face. But I felt quite equal to her gaze

and kept my semblance of slow-breathing slumber. I thought she meant to rise and leave me, but I little anticipated her thought. I felt a slow, cautious movement and she touched me, her hand upon my arm; and then her fingers slipped along my wrist and down into my hand. It was a huge effort not to close my own upon them, but I did not. I drew a long deep breath, to cover the stir of my heart, and turned my face a bit toward her. She waited. Presently, as I did not move again, she removed her hand, and I felt that slowly, gently, she was creeping nearer.

The instant jump of my nerves at recognition of this, however, was quite different from the thing that had been on me the night before. It was a wide-awake, startled alertness, as to what move she meant to make, as an indication of what was to be the outcome of our strange new contact. I held my breath involuntarily; but she noted that and stopped. I breathed again, naturally as my tense nerves would let me, and she stirred once more. In a moment I felt her touch again against me, her hand on my shoulder, my breast, her arm across my neck. I felt the warmth of her against me, the silken touch of her soft body, one little foot against my knee — and she drew herself close and closer, till her sweet breath was in my nostrils and her hair lay against

my eyes. Still the tiger in me did not stir — only a queer pitying fondness, as if she were a forlorn little pet, dragging itself back after mischief, to curry favor again by humble caress.

But she did not rest at this. She raised her head and drew herself against me — upon me, and clasped her soft arms about my neck. She pressed her lips on mine and held them there with a kiss that seemed to dare and tempt and plead, all at once; and I opened my eyes once more to see the sunlight through the cloud of her wonderful hair, that made of it all the rays of the rainbow for my sight. And I clasped her close, with only tenderness and re-awakening love and kindness and forgetfulness of every hurt and wrong in all my being toward her — as if that prayer of mine had really found a hearing somewhere, to the purifying of my heart.

We did not speak. We lay quiet and at peace for a little, while the gladness of it held off sadder thoughts. When she spoke it was in a little, whispering, timid way that drew my arms tighter about her and made me kiss her again softly, on the forehead that was pressed close to my lips. And she whispered of sorrow and regret and returned affection, and missed care; and terror and dread and shock and pain and need. She told no connected story, only the broken terms themselves in tremulous, grow-

ing eagerness, her whole frame shivering at memories that she did not try to describe but that were told vividly enough in the broken phrases she uttered. I felt the wet of tears between her cheek and mine, and they were not all her tears, for my own eyes blurred and blinded over her panting whisperings.

The sun was high when we rose at last, with a kiss so like the kisses we once had known together that it seemed to restore the earlier days themselves. And once more I made coffee and toast and things in my servantless house and carried them in to a radiant little wife—who seemed almost—oh, almost like what she had been. And I was almost happy—almost happy with my broken treasure mended again. It was nearly as good as new.

Of course, the time had to come when we spoke of Alice and of her dead husband. Carmen wept silently, when I told her what I felt about our duty to do all we could to help our old friend; and she promised to go at once to Alice—for I believed she would be welcome still. I had the active things to do, and over discussion of them we reached almost the ground on which we had once stood, the ground of common interest and a common front to the world outside. When I had left the house I looked back almost unbelievably, on the night's experience, and the morning's—and with a mixture

of joy and grief, hope and trepidation, anxiety and determination I had never before known.

Otherwise the day brought forth nothing but commonplaces, like other days of sad duties and rites. Friends of Alice came and were met. Arrangements for funeral, conferences with lawyers, satisfaction of the reporters, the dismal business with the professionals who must make their business thrive on death — all these things fell to my share. And then there was evening again, at home with Carmen.

And now — how can I give an idea of the suddenness with which my new dream was dashed? Carmen insisted on having Isobel Grail to dinner with us that night.

“She is so lonely and so terrified that it is cruel not to do something for her,” she said.

I could not say that Isobel Grail deserved her punishment, such as it was, without reflecting on my own wife. Therefore, I assented and Isobel came. She did not look to me like the grief-stricken, terror-ridden woman. She seemed wonderfully to have regained her poise. I could not help comparing her dark, calm face with Alice Hyatt's blighted look when I told her the thing in which this woman had an active, if I am not to say guilty, share.

We sat at dinner together and the women talked.

What they discussed I cannot say, for I did not listen much. I thought of all the things I had to build upon in rearing hopes once more. I watched Carmen's lovely graciousness toward me. I put up my golden castle in the air about the golden aureole of her beautiful hair, and dreamed tinsel dreams of life to come in it — just as I used to dream, those days when I built gold castles around the glow in her window at night in the house next door. Just as simple, just as wrapt, just as eager and absorbed, I sat unlistening to their talk, intent only on anticipations.

Carmen had speedily found servants for her immediate housekeeping and the dinner was fairly good. The two were rather far from uncheerful over it. As I had an errand to do for Mrs. Hyatt, however, I was a little hurried and I left them at table to go out. I had promised to return promptly and had gotten my hat preparatory to leaving. I waved a hand at Carmen, in passing the dining-room on my way out. As I opened the hall-door, however, it occurred to me to ask Carmen if she would want her car next day — the day of the funeral — for I had not yet sent for it to the garage where it was kept. I abruptly closed the door and turned back to the dining-room.

I happened to be on a thick rug that gave forth no sound of my step. The noise of the closing hall-door had been to the two women conclusive sign that I had gone. As I came to the dining-room door, the odd way in which they were smiling at each other stopped me for a second, though I had then no notion of eavesdropping. But I had no choice.

Isobel's dark-gowned back was toward me. The center-light over the table was beyond her. She was almost a silhouette to me. Carmen was a brilliant flower-like picture under the glow of the incandescents. Mrs. Grail had leaned forward and one hand was up and half extended toward my wife, and a finger and thumb were pinched together significantly.

"Carmen, you have him just like that," was what I heard her say, with a low laugh. "You're a fool if you don't hold on to him. You'll never get another like him."

Carmen's roguish smile broadened till her tiny teeth showed. She interlaced her fingers under her chin and leaned forward with her elbows on the table.

"He's mad about me, I do believe," she said. "I wouldn't have believed it would work as well

as it did. Carl Prince wasn't any easier to put it over than Harry. You should have seen them fuss over me."

Isobel Grail laughed. "You little devil!" she said playfully. "But Harry's a nice boy. I tried hard to flirt with him and he wouldn't flirt. I haven't his key, you see."

"Oh, yes, he's a nice boy," said Carmen. "He's just a big boy. I wish you could have seen him last night, when he had to undress me!"

I drew back from the door. They had neither seen nor heard me. I crept to the outer door and opened it noiselessly, and went out, drawing it together after me without a sound. Then I went down the stairs, and felt an odd dread of slipping on the marble slabs. My golden castle had suddenly puffed into dull smoke, like a piece of fireworks in daylight, and I was a little staggered by it, despite my precalloused spots.

CHAPTER XV.

DEEP WATERS

THE funeral of Dan Hyatt next day was like a dream to me. I was in a sort of daze all the time, I think, from the moment I left the door of my home till it was all over and I was back again the following night with Carmen, alone in our apartment. The night before I had stayed away late, purposely — or helplessly — and Carmen had been asleep when I came home. I was careful not to wake her. Also in the morning I had left every service for her to the new maid, who took Marie's place. I had found everything I could invent to do, a welcome help to separate me from her and to put off the evil moment when our balance must be struck. So that night, after poor Dan Hyatt was buried, was the time of our first real opportunity to take up our own affairs.

We had had a quiet dinner down town when we returned from the cemetery. Carmen had complained then that I seemed distraught, as she called it. When we got home she was in a little temper

about it, and had made one or two remarks that looked towards fresh allusions to my regard for Alice. After she had laid aside her hat and gloves and seated herself in the accustomed place — and how well I remember her busy hands over the familiar little manicure things — she opened a sharper fire.

"Anyone would think, Harry," she said, "that you were Alice Hyatt's brother — or her lover."

I looked up at her. I could see that the time had come when I must face it, but with my pain came an impulse to nasty sarcasm that prevailed.

"You shouldn't say such things to me, Carmen," said I. "Don't you know that you have me, just like that?"

I pinched my finger and thumb together in the air before her, and she started as if I had pinched her tender flesh. Then she tried to cover her movement. She laughed, though her eyes seemed almost to change color and shape under mine.

"Have I?" she asked.

"Yes," I answered gravely. "I'm sure you realize it. You're a fool if you don't hold on to me."

Her hands went down into her lap, and she stared at me, her breath making a noticeable pause.

"I'm holding on to you, as hard as I can, Harry," she said with a sudden pleading tone.

"You'll never get another like me."

I grinned to cover the fact that I was quoting, as long as it could be covered. She could hardly doubt now, but still she seemed mystified.

"I'm mad about you, Carmen," I added, rising as I returned to gravity. "That's why you could put it over me quite as easily as you did over Carl Prince."

"Harry!"

She started forward, scattering the manicure things to the floor.

"Yes," said I, relentlessly. "It's too bad there should have been no witnesses to so convincing a scene as that here, night before last, when your deserted, befooled, infatuated boy-husband was forced to undress you!"

Every sign of color faded from my wife's face. Even her red, red lips went gray. For a moment, I thought she was going to faint. But she didn't. She looked at me with eyes that seemed fascinated with a sudden fear. She was like a person who had abruptly found a chasm where she was about to put her foot, and stands poised, at unbelieving, yet horrified, gaze. If she was not horrified, she was amazed. She had no clue as to how I had obtained my knowledge of her conversation with her friend, and the ground on which she had sup-

posed she could stand was completely swept away. I was tempted to laugh a nasty laugh, and leave her, but better instincts began to rise.

"I suppose," I said, "that such frankness will hardly be conducive to content and peace between us now, Carmen. You may take your time about deciding what you will do, and stay here till you have reached a decision. I am sure, however, that you won't expect me to remain in the house. I shall go to the club."

Still she sat quiet, without an effort to respond, so I continued.

"I would advise you not to go to Mrs. Grail. There'll be a scandal around her name sooner or later. As for Granden, don't go to him, either, till you have gotten a legal separation from me. I won't stand for that. I suppose he has probably not told you that I nearly killed him at the lake for saying that you belonged to him?"

Carmen gave a convulsive little gasp, but did not speak.

"No?" said I. "Well, I guess he was nearer right than I after all. If he gets you, after you are rid of me, I shall not molest either of you. I shall put no obstacles in the way of the getting. But, if he gets you *while you are my wife*, I'll kill

him. And I shall know whether or not to take that step."

I walked to the coat closet and took my hat and gloves. Then I went to the outer door. I wanted to go on, without looking or speaking again, but I couldn't. I turned.

"The queer part of it is, Carmen," I said, "that you were both right — you and Isobel. I loved you — and I have been just a boy about it. It was puppy-love, after all — the sort that never really can grow up."

I went out, and down and into the street. It was raining again, hard. It seemed to rain all the time that spring. But I walked down the block with the feeling that the gloom and cool wet were welcome and that I could not face even a cabman's eyes, certainly not a car-full or club-full of people. So I walked on, unmindful of the rain that pelted me and soaked my coat. I felt it strike in around my collar and come in cold on my legs. I felt it wet on the backs of my hands, and noticed the slipperiness of the starch on my cuffs as I curled up my fingers. In two minutes the water was running from the brim of my hat. Then I felt the damp on my shoulder-blades and the cold tightness of my shoes across the instep. After that I felt just wet, and

wetter, with a chill that I rather liked on a hot skin, and I went on and on, not wholly without comfort in my physical condition as a sort of counter to my mental state.

I walked down the avenue for blocks, meeting no one. An occasional cab splashed by, with dim-gleaming lights. I crossed through a side street and came out at the wide, dark side of one of the parks, that was near us. The blackness in the dripping bushes tempted me. Only widely separated, white arc-lights pierced points in the darkness. The paths were blind leads into the shrubbery, like holes to which a fugitive human animal might crawl away to be alone. The fine gravel of the walks, half flooded with water, swashed under foot but the sound was deadened by the noise of the rain on a million leaves. I walked in the midst of it all, and on and on and on, past a wide, gray lagoon, under a pale-lighted pavilion, through the long shed of a boathouse — where the varied sound of the rain on the shingles made me feel oppressed. I went over a rustic bridge, with so high an arch that the climb was an effort on the slippery planks and I had to take hold of the rail. I knew I was a fool to go on — the physical risk and exposure were very great for a man of my habits. But I was perverse in it and I did not much care about consequences. Indeed,

I half hoped for consequences of the most likely sort. And, for once, I was getting my wish. I crept out into a wide still lawn, where there were gleams in the rain-washed grass though I could see no light that made them. I crawled through a sodden rose-garden where the drops made loud spats on broader leaves. I wandered by the black and white windows of a dark greenhouse and into a sunken garden, where I stumbled out of the path and trod down foliage-plants in the long beds with a dull appreciation that it was too bad I was making such damage. I waded through a tiny, trickling stream and passed by a pool where the rain was making a myriad of little upstanding gnome-like splashes, with every instant a gnome for each falling drop that plopped the surface.

I struck my shins against a bench by the high brick posts of a gate finally, and then smelled the damp, dank odor of wet stables. This turned me back, and I followed a long stone stairway to the top and went out upon an open space where I could see no limits. But I ran fairly into a box-like affair set upon posts and filled with sand, and knew I was at a tee-off on the golf-course. So I remembered that at the upper end there was a road where a saloon might be found, and the thought reminded me of whisky and that it was something that might

help. So I staggered and slipped and slid out across the grass, with my eyes on certain yellow lights far off and low at the edge of the black sky.

I made the saloon. It was full of noisy, wet, ill-smelling men, who looked at me and grinned and went on making noise and let me drink in peace. So I poured down glass after glass of raw, burning stuff and felt the craze of it mount from my heated stomach through my veins to my brain. And out I went again to plunge back into the black depths of the park.

That is nearly all I remember. I have a recollection that my eyelids grew heavy suddenly, as if overweighted by the gathering raindrops on them, and that I tripped and went down softly in the grass, and felt it heave and sway under me and begged to be carried, because I was too tired to walk any more. And then I went off on a long, long journey alone, through a legion of half-acceptable troubles, in which I seemed just to be satisfied if I could reach out and pull any of them between my eyes and the dark silhouette of Isobel Grail against the glow of incandescents on the golden head of Carmen, my wife.

They told me afterwards that it was the next forenoon at eight o'clock that a policeman found me lying by a hedge in the open park, under the still falling rain, and shouting, "For it's always fair

weather," as if I were only ordinary drunk in a well-shielded club-room, instead of half dead with brain fever and congestion of the lungs, in one of the people's playgrounds. They told me I lay for six long weeks in my home apartment where they took me; that I fought to get away; that I nearly burned myself alive with a devoted nurse one night, by overturning the light; that I screamed at my wife like a gibbering monkey, when she came near me; and that I went down so close to death that my good doctor and consulting physicians told Carmen—in quite other phrase, of course—that there would be no necessity of her suing for divorce. And even then I could not die.

I woke up one day in midsummer and looked up to see a woman sitting beside me. I imagined I knew her, but was sure it couldn't be she whom I thought. Then I found out that it was—Alice Hyatt. It had only chanced so. She had come to see me and Carmen had happened to be out. The nurses knew that Alice had been there several times, when Carmen had happened to be out, and that she had not come in. So one of them brought her in. I didn't know why till afterwards when someone told me. And it was she, Alice Hyatt—Alice Van Tuyl, as I called her for a moment in my puzzle—who was by me when I came out of unconsciousness.

She was there as much as a minute. She smiled at me and put her hand on my head and then went away and left a lot of flowers I wouldn't give a hang about in the strange disappointment of her going, and I went to sleep immediately afterwards and didn't see her again for weeks. But her gray eyes looked at me kindly — oh, so kindly! Kind Alice Van Tuyl! They were so very sweetly gray under the black hat she was wearing! I remembered them and thought about them. And I saw Carmen come in from time to time and stand and look at me, from under a jaunty white hat, with brilliant blue eyes the color of corn-flowers, and went back to think about the gray ones again, because the blue ones had such a queer curious look in them, and no kindness whatever.

I got well — what for, nobody knows, and I least of all. Carmen was away most of the time — had been away most of the time since I had been brought home, but she was still living in the apartment. And I struggled up to health without her. When she came in she asked me formally how I was and I told her I was a long way from dead; and I found a few foolish jokes to crack about convalescence, when the nurses were present. When we were alone, as only happened twice, I think, we had nothing to say, and I stared out of the window.

Only once did she say an intimate thing, and that was the second time we were together.

"You surely have made a spectacle of yourself, Harry," she told me suddenly, as she turned after standing at our window. "You've made some pretty revelations in your delirium."

"Have I?" said I weakly, and not caring a whit.

"Yes. Besides, why didn't you go to the club that night, if you wanted to get drunk, instead of to a nasty little road-house — and the park?"

I did not answer that. It didn't seem worth while. "Have you done anything about divorce?" I asked instead.

"Living here?" she asked. "Of course not."

"Oh," said I. "Well, don't wait long, please. Take advantage of my drunk."

She turned and looked down at me. "Harry, you expect too much of a woman," she remarked, and went away. I wonder yet if she meant about the divorce.

So I got well. I got out after a while. The first day I was able, I dragged myself down the block and up to Alice Hyatt's door. And she let me in because I was white and shaking and couldn't go away again till I rested. And I told her a little of the truth about myself and Carmen — just a little

for she wouldn't listen to much. How good and true she was! She made me be honest and true, too, at moments, though I seemed just then to have lost my wish for such attributes of character. She was her old quiet, clear-visioned, humorous self, toward all the world, gentle, with sweet womanly dignity and so without a thought of accusation or blame against a soul in the universe. There was no touch of bitterness in her and I saw her with new eyes for all the loveliness in her, body and soul, that day, though I believe I had always unconsciously made a sort of shrine before her type of womanhood.

And I lost my head, in a sort of return to delirium, I think. "Alice," I said to her, "Carmen is going to get a divorce. I shall be free. Is it wrong for me to tell you now that — that when time has passed I — I want to come back here —"

"Harry," she interrupted, "you have been very ill. I can forgive more from you than I would if you were well. Please stop where you are, though, and we'll forget what you've said."

"We won't," I persisted. "We'll do as others do — find happiness, at any cost." My brain was whirling. I reached to take her hands, but she put me back with one gentle push.

"We'll do right," she whispered. But as I

looked I saw that her hand was trembling over the work she was doing.

I was dumb. After a time she grew quite calm again, though her color was higher than I had ever seen it, and she talked of a vacation for me in the country, and of other harmless affairs like that, which would quiet me and guard herself from more outbreaks. And I went away, at last, ashamed and miserable as I deserved to be, but with opened eyes.

During the week that followed, Carmen went back home to her mother. She said good-by in a formal sort of way, and a few days later her lawyer notified me of suit. I told my attorney to let her get her decree as quickly and easily as possible, and to keep me personally free from it all, at any expense to my reputation and my pocket. So when she charged cruelty, and went as far back as the night of our first outright quarrel to glean instances that would take on the proper color, with the testimony of Marie to help her, no defense was made and the judgment was rendered quickly. When she had her decree and our lawyers had arranged her income, she literally ran away from it all and I heard soon after that she had sailed for Japan with Isobel Grail.

And that was the end. She's been abroad two years now. I understand that she is in Switzerland. And Arnold Granden is, nominally, in Paris. So

I know what is coming. Meanwhile I have been working along — and writing this story — for some other boy and girl to read — perhaps before they make a wreck of their lives. And even now I do not know just what to say. Do you understand why Carmen married me, and why I married her? Do you know why I have told all the tale of our life together and what is the meaning of it? Perhaps you can judge better than I. Perhaps you will know whether her charges against me were true or mine against her were just. Maybe you can see whether I was a mere sensual brute and whether our failure was mixed of that and her feeling that she paid for all I gave her with her beauty alone. Is it right for a woman to look on married life as a bargaining, in which she barter herself as a toy for support and for freedom from the restraints of single life? Was that what Carmen did? Was she simply intoxicated with her power over men and led on by it, or did she deliberately use it to get the things she wanted? Was she mad for conquest as the proper tribute to her great beauty, and did she tire of the conquered when she was certain of his enslavement? Did I spoil her, and give her false ideas in our earliest relations? Was I responsible for her low opinion of men or was I simply a victim of that opinion?

And who is to tell the boy who looks at the budding beauties of the girl next door, what love really is? How is he to distinguish it from passion? How is he to know, too, whether he is wooing an Alice or a Carmen? How is the girl to know when he is ardent, that he holds higher thoughts than of mere possession of her? Yes, women have power — physical power — over men. But they need not trade upon it. They can use it, but not merely to compel. They can help and lift and guide, not merely tempt and gratify. Isn't that more of what it should mean to be — a wife?

And the man? He has power also, and has no right simply to indulge. He cannot but mold the woman who loves him. Inevitably he will shape her thoughts and conceptions of all those things in which her relations with him are vital.

Is not the responsibility joint and equal and *must* it not be an unselfish, honest, sensible relation — this marriage that society has instituted — if it is to be a success? Look at the successes, and see of what they are made. There is no spirit of trade in them. There is heart alliance, pure and simple.

This has been a story of the trifling detail of very commonplace lives. But all lives are made up, fundamentally, of trifles. There are no great dramatic situations in most. None the less are the

situations vital. In every wedlock there will be the eternal struggle of sense against spirit, deny it as we may. Can't boys and girls learn to face it and to know and to save the mistakes that Carmen and I made? I do not pity Carmen now, any more than I pity myself. Perhaps she has learned, and she certainly seems to be finding pleasure if not happiness in the world, without me. I think often of her. I hear a little about her, but the real adulation — the old worship — is gone, because my eyes are opened. Isn't it too bad, though, that they were not opened long ago? And hers, too?

And now that I have told my tale and made my speculative homily, I can turn to one other thing that stays persistently in my mind. I've lived long alone, here in this little old apartment, with the living-room windows that look out upon the avenue, and the little worn spot in the floor near the door. I am tired of it now. I've outgrown it, too. I'm thinking of going away. Yes, I'm quite settled about that. There's one question, though, that vexes me. My best nurse, while I was ill, who has since been my housekeeper — she is a middle-aged woman — once told me that, in delirium, the revelations I made were of a sort that Carmen could hardly be expected to repeat to me — or to forgive. She says I cried out one name and wanted one person

—always one person in all the agony of my unconscious suffering. She, good woman, has never known who it was for whom I asked, for the name is not familiar to her. She tells me I plead and entreated her over and over again to go and bring to me dear Alice Van Tuyl — because Alice Van Tuyl was kind. I always asked for Alice.

And now, after two long years of waiting, thinking, waiting, in my sane mind and heart that same longing seems a fixed desire that presently will not brook the smothering I've tried to put upon it. The only question is, am I fit, am I a man worthy to go to Alice and ask her to be — my wife?

THE END

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